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PLAYBOY

Celebrating 60 Years of the *Playboy Advisor*

From grope suits to grapefruits, our sex-positive advice column has been satisfying the curious on matters of the heart, body and soul for six decades

BY **THE PLAYBOY EDITORS**

PHOTO BY **POMPEO POSAR**

It can be hard to imagine a world in which answers weren't as easy to come by as simply shouting a question at your phone or across the room. ("Siri, what is shrimping?" "Alexa, can you define spectrophilia?") But 60 years ago information wasn't so readily available—especially when the issue involved sex. So when PLAYBOY debuted its Advisor column in 1960, it's no surprise that it quickly became a popular resource for those curious about sex and how to live the good life.

Each month the Advisor provided a forum where anonymous men and women could ask questions of a dependable authority without fear of judgment. Whether addressing the definition of a flying Philadelphia fuck (fellatio, with partner assists from a rocking chair and chin-up bar) or explaining the nature of the goat's eyelid (an ancient sex toy), the Advisor was a trusted voice of reason, assuring readers their urges, interests and bodies were, for the most part, totally normal.

"Our mission in life is to make sex better for everyone," declared the Advisor in 2001, a mantra that holds true today. Yet far from promoting a conquering or cavalier attitude toward sex, the Advisor regularly counseled patience and understanding between partners and would-be paramours. A 2000 study of Playboy Advisor's first four decades, written by a sociologist and two psychologists, concluded that its content "tended toward tolerance, promoted equality between the sexes and broke down, rather than reaffirmed, stereotypes."

Below, we look back at some of our favorite reader letters, one from each of Advisor's first six decades of publication. Here's to 60 more years of solid advice!

1960s: Looks Like He Made It

In December 1965 the Advisor published a letter from a young man at a crossroads. "B.M." said he was a rising star in the corporate world who was thinking about abandoning his success to pursue his musical dreams. The Advisor encouraged him to risk it. The young man who took the advice? Barry Manilow.

Q: Music has always been a vital part of my life. Due to financial difficulties, however, I had to stop attending music school and accept a job at a leading radio-and-television network. Through enormous good fortune, I have been promoted very rapidly and at the age of 22 I hold a junior executive position with a very generous salary. The only drawback is that this position has absolutely nothing to do with music. During these past few years, between working and attending college, I have managed to musically direct and conduct three full-scale musicals at various theater workshops in New York. I now have an offer to take this last musical out of town for a period of six to eight months at a good salary with the promise of a permanent position as a musical director. My musical wild oats are screaming to be sown, but it means giving up my secure job. Leaves of absence are rare, so it looks like it's either one or the other. Any suggestions? —B. M., Brooklyn, New York

A: *Follow your real interest and take the musical out of town. At your age, your financial responsibilities are few. If you remain in the secure job, you may regret for the rest of your life that you didn't sow your notes. You can always go back to radio and television: Your ability was recognized once; chances are it would be recognized again—if not with your former employer, then elsewhere.*

1970s: Dress for Success

Kinksters and the sexually curious found a listening ear in the Advisor. This letter from August 1975 concerns a reader's quest for specialized gear for herself. Sure, it was the "me" decade, but the Advisor was a constant source of encouragement for sexual exploration and the normalization of self-pleasure.

Q: I've been reading about a Scandinavian sex device called a grope suit. Supposedly, it will keep a woman in an almost constant state of orgasm. Would you know anything about it—for instance, where I could purchase the device? —Miss F. D., Melbourne, Florida

A: *Grope suits came out of the closet after Alex Comfort devoted a paragraph to them in Joy of Sex. In case your little brother stole your copy, Comfort describes the attire as a m"very tight rubber G string with a thick phallic plug which fits in the vagina and a roughened knob over the clitoris. The bra has small toothed recesses in the cups which grip the nipples and is covered all over inside with soft rubber points. Once it is on, every movement touches a sensitive area." Yee-hah. In spite of publicity, it's almost impossible to find a grope suit in this country. The Sears catalog doesn't mention one.... Invent your own erotic wardrobe: bikinis made out of waist chains, leather thongs, feathered boas, inflated balloons—the fittings are a gas. In cool weather, an inside-out fur coat is a reliable turn-on. If you believe that less is more, try going out on a date without wearing underwear. You'll find that clothes can make a woman.*

1980s: Hygiene Hijinks

Along with copious queries about positions, performance and penis size, questions about oral sex have been a popular topic in Advisor across the decades. This variation on "don't eat before swimming" appeared in November 1988.

Q: I've heard that it is dangerous to brush your teeth or floss before performing oral sex. Why? —P. U., Dallas, Texas

A: *If God had wanted you to floss before having oral sex, he wouldn't have provided pubic hair. Actually, a recent issue of Sexuality Today warned against brushing before having a bedtime snack—it is thought that you might lacerate your gums, thus opening the way to sexually transmitted infection. Of course, if you never brush your teeth, you won't be able to attract a partner in the first place. This advice assumes that your partner has an infection. If he or she doesn't, then continue with your normal program for oral hygiene.*

1990s: Orange You Glad to See Me

The 2017 comedy Girls Trip immortalized grapefruiting—a blow-job-abetting move that real-life sex educator Auntie Angel had been teaching for at least a decade prior. In August 1994 the Advisor addressed a question from a reader whose adventurous but misinformed girlfriend turned him into a fan of sexy citrus play.

She halved the third orange and rubbed it all over her body, which I licked clean.

Q: I thought I had experienced everything in the erotic world until the night my girlfriend came into my bedroom stark naked, holding three large oranges and a knife. She carved a hole in the end of the first one and allowed the juice to drip all over my genitals. She cut the second one into four wedges, squeezed them and licked the juice off my scrotum. She then forced the head of my erect penis into the hole of the first orange, gently squeezing and turning the orange until I came. She halved the third orange and rubbed it all over her body, which I licked clean. Then she asked me to squirt the juice directly into her vagina. Have you ever heard of having sex with citrus fruit? My girlfriend says citric acid fights infection. Is that true? —F. B., Hesperia, Michigan

A: *Sounds as if you had a delicious time. Your girlfriend is an inspired and imaginative woman, but her claim that citric acid fights infection is false. Citric acid will sting when applied to a cut, but it is not an antiseptic. However, you needn't worry about scurvy in the near future.*

We don't doubt your penis grew, but the only moon that has any influence on it is your wife's ass.

2000s: Moon Units

The Advisor is well known for respectful guidance on serious questions. But regarding this September 2001 letter, you know what they say about asking a ridiculous question…

Q: My wife told me that my erection appears larger on nights with a full moon. I didn't believe her, so she measured me every night for two months. And, sure enough, on nights just before, during and after a full moon, I was half an inch longer. Have you heard of this before? Does it have anything to do with the moon's gravitational pull? —R. J., New York, New York

A: *That's a new one. Does your pubic hair get thicker too? We don't doubt your penis grew, but the only moon that has any influence on it is your wife's ass. You both expected it to be larger in the moonlight, which influenced how aroused you became when she prepared you and took measurements. That could easily account for that half inch. Under controlled conditions, there would be no difference. The moon does not move the blood or water in your body as it does the tides, and its gravitational pull is a function of its distance from the Earth, not its phase. Nevertheless, your wife should continue to stroke and examine your erection every day.*

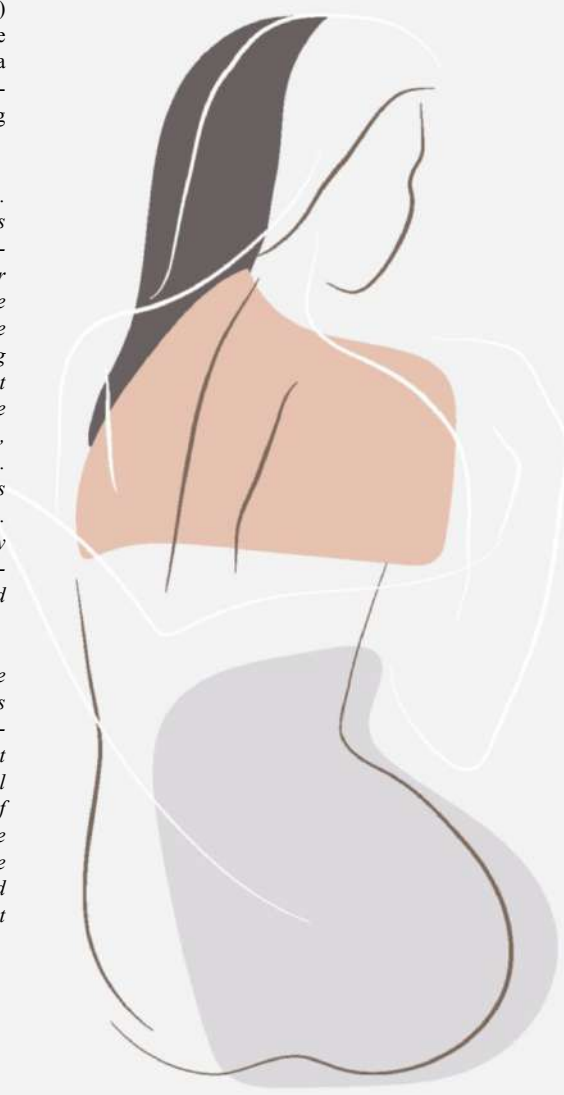
2010s: Unicorns Beware

For more than 50 years, the Advisor was a man. That changed in 2016, when the appropriately named Rachel Rabbit White pulled on the Advisor mantle and began addressing topics including toxic friendships, manic pixie fuck-boys, chemsex and this memorable installment on thirsty threesomes:

Q: We're a heterosexual couple in search of a "unicorn" (an attractive bisexual woman) to join us for a few date nights a week. We've had some one-off threesomes but can't find a partner to join us more long-term. Apps, dating sites, friends, acquaintances—nothing has worked. What are we doing wrong?

A: *Unicorn hunters have a bad reputation. Perhaps it's the polyamorous community's endless lingo: ambigusweetie, new relationship energy, friends-first swinging and other terms that reek of corporate buzzwords. One has to wonder if all polyamorous people are middle managers. Of the threesome-seeking couples on Tinder, inevitably she is bi but without much experience, and of course he loves to watch. Tina, a former unicorn, has been on her share of "throuple" dates. "These couples are called unicorn hunters because they're often predatory," she says. Couples end up treating her like a fantasy rather than a partner; these pairs are simply looking for someone to fill a preimagined role….*

To answer your question: You may not be doing anything wrong. Dating itself consists of endless trial and error, as well as numerous bar tabs that never pay off. In ancient Greece the unicorn was believed to be a real beast. In medieval times the lack of proof of the animal's existence helped move it into the realm of myth. And as you're discovering, the fantasy of a third person, one who enters and exits a relationship with ghostly ease, is just as unattainable.



The Dope Tutor Answers

WHAT IS CALI SOBER?

Skipping booze and hard drugs in favor of cannabis and psychedelics is a practice with a long American history—and a bright future

BY **ANDREW DEANGELO** ILLUSTRATIONS **RICHARD A. CHANCE**

When Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill Wilson dropped acid in 1956, it transformed his thinking about sobriety. He experienced a spiritual awakening that led him to embrace LSD as a potential treatment for chronic alcoholism, believing acid could put people in touch with the higher power needed to overcome addiction. (Clinical studies have since indicated that Wilson's instinct was spot-on: LSD use may indeed help reduce alcohol abuse.) Wilson couldn't have known it at the time, but he was making early contributions to what we know today as the "Cali sober" lifestyle.

When journalist and rave culturalist Michelle Lhooq popularized the term Cali sober in 2019, she may not have known about Wilson's acid trip, but she did know she wanted to quit drinking and using hard drugs. Both cannabis and psychedelics, she felt, could be allies on that journey—useful substitutes for more harmful compounds.

Cali sober generally means avoiding booze and hard drugs but not weed or psychedelics such as acid, MDMA and psilocybin. But Cali sober is a flexible lifestyle that allows people a nuanced approach to sobriety and intoxication. Some who call themselves Cali sober still drink lightly on occasion, often just one glass of wine or a single cocktail. And as you might expect for a term short for "California," it comes with healthful associations: Yoga, meditation and other wellness practices are common add-ons to the Cali sober life. Above all, going Cali sober means taking control of your own health and wellness and rejecting rigid, binary definitions of sobriety.

"What matters with Cali sober is that it becomes additive to life and happiness," culture journalist Jackie Bryant tells me, "not a numbing or addictive way out of life." Writer Molly Lambert has remarked that going Cali sober means you are "weed edge"—an update of being "straight edge," a descriptor popularized by sober punk rockers who rejected intoxicants and believed sobriety gave them an advantage.

In recent years Cali sober events, though mostly on a pandemic pause now, have been growing more common, including Weed Raves in L.A. and New York City hosted by Lhooq and high-end cannabis-infused dinner parties from Malibu to Seattle. Numerous Northern California weed farms now host wellness retreats, and this Dope Tutor has attended more than one Cali sober event that was just as fun and social as any booze-infused event.

Though Cali sober might be a prime example of an enlightened 21st century self-care strategy, the practice of choosing cannabis over other recreational drugs emerged long ago. In the Jazz Age of the 1920s and 1930s, some musicians drank booze or took heroin before playing—others just smoked weed. (By my estimation, the weed smokers generally had longer musical careers.) When beatniks and poets began embracing jazz and cannabis in the 1940s and 1950s, some replaced alcohol in favor of cannabis.

As the Age of Aquarius dawned in the 1960s, LSD proliferated beyond government labs and onto the streets. New lifestyle practices revolving around cannabis and psychedelics began to emerge as a backlash to society's alcoholic predilections. Subculture gatherings like the Rainbow Family of Living Light in the 1970s and early reggae festivals strongly discouraged alcohol, but weed was shared freely and widely. Many hippie communes and organic farms did not allow booze, though ganja and other "visionary" plants were an integral part of operations. This was not a world of microdosing before a cocktail party—this was a world of creating alternative realities separate from the dominant culture. These early pioneers laid the groundwork for the Cali sober lifestyle.

Yet the burgeoning societal shift away from alcohol and toward cannabis and psychedelics ran into a brick wall in the 1980s: Ronald Reagan and the war on drugs. The implementation of widespread workplace drug testing had a huge effect on the ability of working people to consume cannabis: Weed can be detected up to 60 days after consumption, whereas cocaine typically leaves the body after only a few days. Prohibition does not stop people from using drugs, but it can make drug use more dangerous, as users seek other, sometimes riskier, paths to intoxication. And unlike cannabis at the time, alcohol was cheap and easily accessible by anyone of legal age.

THE BEAUTY OF "CALI SOBER" IS THAT IT ALLOWS SPACE FOR EXPERIMENTATION, FOR A PERSON TO DEFINE THE TERM BASED ON THEIR OWN NEEDS AND TO RECALIBRATE AS NECESSARY.

In 1996 California was the first state to legalize medical cannabis, launching a post-Reagan renaissance in mainstream pop culture of what we now know as the Cali sober lifestyle. It took more than two decades for legalization to spread, but today about 100 million Americans live in legal-weed states, allowing them to experiment with cannabis consumption and the Cali sober lifestyle.

That's the beauty of Cali sober: It allows space for experimentation, for a person to define the term based on their own needs and to recalibrate as necessary—including seeking help if needed. I believe our world can be healed with the help of visionary plants like cannabis, and encouraging the Cali sober lifestyle is one way to get more people to the party.

TIMELESS BEAUTY

Ananda Richardson

Model **@leggydancer**

Photography by **Robert Coello in Kona | @ artofwomenfashion & Marcus A. 48th St Photography | @48thstreetphotography**
Wardrobe **Bobby Sea Bikinis | @bobbyseabikinis**
Jewelry **Keshi Co Hawaii | @keshicohawaii**

What does your dream life look like five years from now? Five years from now, I see a life with freedom, stability, and an easy rhythm. I am living near my extended family, watching my nieces and nephews grow up, and spending my days doing work that feels fulfilling and natural.

What originally inspired you to pursue your career path? I first realized I could do men's magazine modeling in my early twenties when a sunglasses campaign I shot for a skate company was featured in FHM. I returned to it last year when it aligned naturally with my fitness goals and felt like the right moment.

What does success mean to you beyond your career? Success to me is balance, peace, and connection. It is feeling good in my body, present in my life, and free enough to enjoy it.

How do you make time for yourself in a busy schedule? I like to build self-care into what I am already doing and let it feel a little indulgent. Movement, work, and quiet moments all count when I slow down and enjoy them.

What motivates you to keep pushing toward your goals? I am motivated by discipline, reward, and inspiration from people who move through life with intention. That mix keeps me focused and wanting more.

What is one life lesson that has shaped who you are today? I have learned that while connection matters, you ultimately have to rely on yourself. There is confidence that comes from knowing you can stand on your own.

What qualities matter most to you in a relationship? I am drawn to someone who makes me feel beautiful on my worst days, who I can relax and laugh with, and who shows up when it counts.

What's the next big move you're planning professionally? I am completing my Pilates teaching certification. It is challenging, rewarding, and opening the door to work that feels exciting and lasting.

How do you define confidence? Confidence is being comfortable in your own skin. Calm, secure, and effortless, without needing validation.

If you could collaborate with anyone in your industry, who would it be? I love collaborating with people who inspire me and teach me something new. Creatives and movers who bring passion and curiosity into their work really draw me in.

What's your favorite travel destination you've visited so far? After traveling to over 30 countries, I have learned that every place has its own energy depending on when and how you experience it, and who you share it with. I don't think there is one answer.

What's one goal you didn't hit last year that you're determined to achieve this time? Last year I did not quite learn how to harvest my own uni, which is sea urchin, even though it is one of my favorite indulgences. I had the gear but not the timing, and it is still calling my name!

What does your perfect day look like? My perfect day is slow, unrushed, and fully present. No pressure, just enjoying where I am.

What's something people might be surprised to learn about you? People are often surprised to learn that I was very shy growing up, and that softness still shows up from time to time.

Playboy Interview

Francis Ford Coppola

A candid conversation with the Midas-touch director of "The Godfather"

INTERVIEW BY **WILLIAM MURRAY** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CARL IRI**

Every year or so, the American movie industry comes up with a talented new young director whose current flick is hailed as the greatest-ever piece of goods; he usually finds himself an overnight celebrity, the darling of TV talk shows and magazine profiles. Few deserve such treatment and even fewer manage to survive it. The latest of Hollywood's directorial darlings is a portly, bearded, fast-talking 36-year-old dynamo named Francis Ford Coppola (pronounced Cope-uh-lah), who made headlines this year by being nominated for five Academy Awards—and winning three of them. In the history of the awards, only the venerable Walt Disney received more nominations (six) in a single year. Coppola was also named best motion-picture director of the year by the Directors Guild of America.

Unlike most of the other boy geniuses, however, Coppola might actually be every bit as talented as the reviewers say he is. His present eminence rests largely on having made The Godfather Part II an even bigger artistic success than the original Godfather, which, in addition to grossing a staggering R4,950.00 million, has been acclaimed by most serious movie critics here and abroad as the greatest gangster picture ever made. For the first time in Hollywood history, a sequel to a tremendously successful motion picture has sur-

passed the original in critical estimation and is likely to do the same at the box office.

Just three years ago, Coppola was broke and so little in demand that he was reportedly only fourth or fifth on Paramount's list of possible candidates to direct what the studio envisaged all along as no more than a big-budget thriller to be carved out of Mario Puzo's sprawling best seller. Since The Godfather, Coppola has become the one person in the movie industry more in demand than Clint Eastwood. "If he took all the offers now coming his way in any one week," a studio executive recently said, "he'd have to work uninterruptedly for the next 50 years and might get to be rich enough to buy up Fort Knox."

The wonder is not that Coppola is so young to be in such a position but that it look Hollywood so long to find out about him. Francis remembers his childhood as an agitated series of crises, with much shouting, passion and tears. His father, Carmine, was a virtuoso flutist who played with several leading orchestras, including Arturo Toscanini's celebrated NBC Symphony. Unable to achieve recognition as a composer, he moved the family back and forth across the country in pursuit of his career, which was finally capped with an Oscar for the score of Godfather II. Francis's older brother, August, a writer, was handsome, brilliant and popular with girls; his sister, Talia, an actress (she played Connie, Michael Corleone's sister in both Godfathers), was the baby of the family. Francis retreated for a while into a fantasy world in which, for hours on end, he played with puppets, watched TV and read comic books.

He aspired to playwrighting but quickly changed his mind when he saw his first Eisenstein film, Ten Days That Shook the World, at the age of 17. "On Monday I was in the theater," Coppola has said, "and on Tuesday I wanted to be a filmmaker."

At UCLA's film school, Coppola won the Samuel Goldwyn writing award and at 22 he landed a job as a staff writer with Seven Arts, a major production company, where he directed a low-budget horror picture for producer Roger Corman. Coppola's master's-thesis film, You're a Big Boy Now, a knockabout farce with a rock score, brought him to the attention of Warner Bros., which signed him to direct a musical, Finian's Rainbow. It flopped. Mostly on his own, Coppola put together The Rain People, a film he wrote and directed about a pregnant woman who leaves her husband, despite the fact that she loves him, because she doesn't want to be married anymore. The movie antedated women's lib and is now considered to have been ahead of its period, a polite way of saying that it didn't make much money. But by that time, Coppola had also co-authored the screenplay of Patton, for which he won an Oscar. He was barely 28 and the odds were he'd make it big, if he just stuck around long enough.

By 1969, however, Coppola had had enough of Hollywood's chaotic financing methods, antiquated production techniques and rigidly entrenched craft unions. He talked Warner's into letting him set up his own production company, American Zoetrope, and moved to San Francisco, where he proposed to turn out high-quality, low-budget features. The company's first project, THX 1138, a futuristic script directed by his friend George Lucas that has since become a cult classic, all but sank it. Warner's canceled its contract, leaving Coppola stranded under a mountain of debts, from which he quickly extricated himself with The Godfather, followed not only by Godfather II but by its rival for best-picture honors in the 1974 Oscars competition, The Conversation.

Today, Coppola's only worry is deciding what to do next. He has enough money to indulge himself and he has a number of projects that have been sitting on his desk and/or maturing in his head for years. In addition to Lucas, whom he prodded into writing and directing the enormously successful American Graffiti—which he produced after the script had been rejected by 11 studios—Coppola has gathered around him in San Francisco a small army of young, supremely talented individualists. They swarm in and out of the Coppola Company headquarters, an old eight-story San Francisco office building that Coppola is restoring. Coppola listens to everyone and overlooks nothing.

Some people feel this may be his undoing as an artist. Coppola willingly delegates authority and listens to advice, but he clearly feels capable of undertaking just about anything interesting that comes his way. He has also set up his own distribution company, has acquired a small legitimate theater, where he plans to produce and direct his own plays as well as those of others, is wheeling and dealing in real estate and publishes a biweekly magazine called City that aspires to do for the San Francisco region something of what New York does for its area. He enjoys a warm home life with his artist wife, Eleanor, and their three small children, as well as an active social one with a wide circle of friends and cronies whom he calls "the family." To find out more about this artist-mogul, PLAYBOY assigned contributor William Murray to track him down on his home grounds and interview him. Murray reports:

"Getting to see Francis Ford Coppola these days is about as difficult as setting up a tête-á-tête with the Godfather himself. It took weeks and dozens of long-distance phone calls, filtered through the usual guard screen of secretaries and superefficient business managers, before a meeting was finally arranged.

"I finally caught up with Coppola at his house, a light-blue, turn-of-the-century, 28-room mansion with a magnificent view of the Golden Gate Bridge. The huge rooms are stocked with gadgets, including an old jukebox, a player grand piano, hi-fi equipment and a fully equipped projection room. It was exactly the sort of palazzo I'd have envisioned for a self-exiled Hollywood tycoon, but I hadn't been in the place more than 20 minutes before I realized that, far from being a self-advertisement for power and success, everything in the house reflected the highly personal, even eccentric tastes of Francis or Eleanor Coppola.

"The first thing Coppola did was to make me a cappuccino on his own espresso machine, imported from Turin. We sat and sipped coffee. Everything was moving at such a leisurely pace that I couldn't imagine at first how I'd ever be able to get a real conversation under way with him.

"I needn't have worried. The minute I switched on my tape recorder, Coppola came to life. This was work. First, he corrected the position of the machine, then he fiddled with the volume and tone controls until he had them set to his satisfaction. Finally, he allowed me to question him. All you have to do with Coppola is get him going. After that, the problem is slowing him down, much less stopping him; I got the feeling he could have been a tremendous politician or an eloquent preacher. We talked for several hours that first day, then continued the next two days at his office.

"Our final session was held at his home. Coppola, wearing an Arab caftan that failed to conceal his bulk, ushered me into one of the Bay Area's largest backyards, where a Moorish-style pool is heated to body temperature. He leaped into the water and for the next five minutes he moaned—very loudly. What if the neighbors complain? he was asked. 'It's my pool,' he answered, 'and I'll moan if I like.' Sipping a cup of espresso while standing in the water, he added: 'Y'know, I like this. It's my idea of real decadence.'

"Back in the living room, Coppola, his robe billowing about him, pirouetted, gavotted and jigged without a trace of self-consciousness to a record of carnival music that he'd brought back from Rio, where he'd gone to unwind for a couple of weeks. Then, I think, I saw the key to Coppola: He throws himself completely into everything he does, whether it's work or play. The man is a block of pure energy, with the powers of concentration of a leopard stalking prey. If anyone can pull off what he proposes to do to the film business, I'm convinced he can and I came away hoping he'd succeed."

COPPOLA: This is my last interview.

PLAYBOY: Why?

COPPOLA: I decided recently that enough is enough. Basically, there's only one story I can tell and I've told it. I think it's time I kind

of go on my way out of respect for the public.

PLAYBOY: All right, let's start with your recent Oscar haul for Godfather II. How did it feel to walk away with so many awards?

COPPOLA: Two years ago, I went to the Academy Awards ceremonies feeling blasé, not caring. I thought Godfather I would win most of the awards, but how important was the Oscar, anyway? Then it became clear that Cabaret was running away with the awards, and I suddenly started wanting to win desperately. When I didn't, I got very depressed. I figured I'd never make another film that would win an Oscar; I was going to go off and make small, personal films, the kind that rarely win awards. I had wanted to leave a winner.

This year, I thought Chinatown would clean up. I had two pictures nominated—Godfather II and The Conversation—and I figured that would split my vote. I was intrigued with the idea of losing twice after coming so close, which might be a record in itself. So when it all happened, I was so elated I didn't know what to do. I never expected Best Picture. I felt Godfather II was too demanding, too complex. But when it won, I felt the members were telling me they appreciated the fact that we'd tried to make a film with integrity.

PLAYBOY: What did you think when Bert Schneider, the producer of the antiwar documentary Hearts and Minds, read a telegram from a Viet Cong representative?

COPPOLA: Many people voted for Hearts and Minds as best documentary, not because it was a great film—it wasn't, particularly—but because of what the film said. And so when Schneider accepted the award, it was certainly appropriate for him to comment on what the film was saying. It wasn't as if they were giving him an award as best tap dancer only to have him turn around and give a political speech. The academy was sanctioning that documentary, was rewarding it for the message it conveyed. So his statement was really a response to that.

PLAYBOY: The incident caused quite an uproar. How did you personally feel about it?

COPPOLA: Imagine, in 1975, getting a telegram from a so-called enemy extending friendship to the American people. I mean, after what we did to the Vietnamese people, you'd think they wouldn't forgive us for 300 years! Getting this positive, human, optimistic message was such a beautiful idea to me—it was overwhelming. If the telegram had said, "You Yankee dogs have been killing us for 30 years and now we've got you, so screw you!" I wouldn't have read it. But it didn't say that.

As for the uproar caused by Frank Sinatra's reading the disclaimer expressing his and Bob Hope's reactions, well, men at that point in their lives can't understand what a message like that really means. They're not interested in the truth; they still think all Communists are bad, less than human. When people are against something, they don't even listen.

PLAYBOY: Your career as a director has been made by the two Godfather movies, and most of the critics seem to have recognized what you were trying to do with them, but none has had a kind word for the novel nor for its author, Mario Puzo. The New Yorker's Pauline Kael, in fact, calls the book trash. Could you have made two fine movies out of trash?

COPPOLA: When I was first offered the project, I started to read the book and I got only about 50 pages into it. I thought it was a popular, sensational novel, pretty cheap stuff. I got to the part about the singer supposedly modeled on Frank Sinatra and the girl Sonny Corleone liked so much because her vagina was enormous—remember that stuff in the book? It never showed up in the movie. Anyway, I said, "My God, what is this? The Carpetbaggers?" So I stopped reading it and said, "Forget it."

Four or five months later, I was again offered the opportunity to work on it and by that time, I was in dire financial straits with my own company in San Francisco, so I read further. Then I got into what the book is really about—the story of the family, this father and his sons, and questions of power and succession—and I thought it was a terrific story, if you could cut out all the other stuff. I decided it could be not only a successful movie but also a good movie. I wanted to concentrate on the central theme, and that's what I tried to do.

So the fact is, it wasn't a piece of trash. Like me, Mario went after the money at first. He's very frank about that. But if the two movies are strong, it's because of what Mario originally put in his book that was strong and valid. Mario himself, by the way, doesn't think The Godfather is his best book, but it's the only one of his novels that sold really well. I have great respect for Mario. He created the story, he created the characters, even in Part II, which I wrote more of than Part I. But all the key elements go back to his book.

PLAYBOY: Did you work together on the screenplays?

COPPOLA: Never. I would do the first draft and send it to him and he would make corrections and rewrite and change anything he wanted to and send it back to me, and then I'd rework it again, and it went back and forth. We work in totally different ways. He's much lazier than I am, which I think he'd admit. What we mainly have in common is that we both like to play baccarat and shoot dice. I like Mario very much.

"The idea of a sequel seemed horrible to me. I used to joke that the only way I'd do it was if they'd let me film 'Abbot and Costello Meet the Godfather'—that would have been fun."

PLAYBOY: Since you weren't a famous director at the time, why did Paramount approach you about making the film?

COPPOLA: The book hadn't yet made an impression. A lot of directors, including Richard Brooks and Costa-Gavras, had already turned it down. At that time, I had an interesting reputation as a director who could make a film economically. Also, I was a writer and I was Italian, so I seemed like an intelligent shot.

PLAYBOY: Had you heard about The Godfather before reading it and hating it?

COPPOLA: Yes, and it's a strange story. One Sunday afternoon, I was sitting around my home in San Francisco, reading The New York Times, and I saw an ad for a new book. Couldn't tell what it was about from the book cover—it looked kind of solemn. I thought it might be an intellectual work by some new Italian author named Mario Puzo, so I clipped the ad. I was just going to inquire about it. Right then, Peter Bart, a friend of mine, came by with someone I'd never met before: Al Ruddy, who later became producer of The Godfather but at that time had nothing to do with the project. We started talking and Peter mentioned a book he'd just heard about: The Godfather, by Mario Puzo. He explained what it was about. I had no interest in filming a best seller, so I said, "No kidding—I just noticed an ad for it." At that very moment, the phone rang. It was Marlon Brando. I'd contacted him to ask if I might send by the script of The Conversation, which I'd written with him in mind. He was just calling to say, "Sure, send the script over."

That all happened in one afternoon. Several months later, Al Ruddy was named producer of The Godfather. I received my first offer to di-

rect it and Marlon Brando would shortly have the lead. It still seems bizarre to me that the various elements came together that day in my home.

PLAYBOY: Once you'd decided to direct the film, how did you get Brando for the title role?

COPPOLA: I must have interviewed 2,000 people. We video-taped every old Italian actor in existence. But it became apparent that the role called for an actor of such magnetism, such charisma, just walking into a room had to be an event. We concluded that if an Italian actor had gotten to be 70 years old without becoming famous on his own, he wouldn't have the air of authority we needed. Robert Evans, who was in charge of production at Paramount, wanted Carlo Ponti, which was an interesting idea: Get someone already important in life, that sort of thinking. But we finally figured that what we had to do was hire the best actor in the world. It was that simple. It boiled down to Laurence Olivier or Marlon Brando, who are the greatest actors in the world. We went back and forth on it, and I finally called Mario to ask him. He told me that, ironically enough, he'd been thinking of Brando as the Godfather all along and had, in fact, written him a letter to that effect over two years before. Brando seemed too young, even to me, but sometimes when you go out on a limb and connect with someone—Mario, in this case—you say, "It's God signaling me." So we narrowed it down to Brando. He had turned down the role in The Conversation some months earlier, but after he'd had a chance to read The Godfather, he called back and said he was interested, that he thought it was a delicious part—he used that word, delicious.

PLAYBOY: Were the studio moguls pleased?

COPPOLA: Hell, no. Ruddy liked Brando, but he said flatly that the studio heads would never buy it. We got in touch with Evans, pitched Brando and listened to him yell at us for being fools. By now, the book was becoming more and more successful, and it was outstripping me in terms of my potency as a director. It was getting bigger than I was. And they were starting to wonder if they hadn't made a big mistake in choosing me as the director.

Time passed, the book got bigger, the budget increased and I refused to send them any new casting ideas. Besides Brando, I already had it in my mind that I wanted Al Pacino, Jimmy Caan, Bobby Duvall and so on. So a big meeting was scheduled with Evans, Stanley Jaffe, who was then the young president of the studio, and assorted lawyers.

Halfway into the meeting, I made another pitch for Brando. Jaffe replied, and these are his exact words, "As president of Paramount Pictures, I assure you that Marlon Brando will never appear in this motion picture and, furthermore, as president of the company, I will no longer allow you to discuss it." Boom. Final. Maybe from his point of view, at that time, it made sense. Paramount, before Love Story, had made a number of flops. And Brando's track record was even worse. But I insisted they hear me out, and Evans persuaded Jaffe to give me five minutes. I stood up as if I were a lawyer pleading for someone's life and went through all the reasons I thought only Brando could play the part. After I'd finished, I pretended to collapse in a heap on the floor.

So Jaffe finally relented, but he gave me certain conditions, the main one being that Brando take a screen test. I'd won. Now all I had to figure was how to get Marlon Brando to take a screen test.

PLAYBOY: How did you?

COPPOLA: Well, you have to realize that despite our telephone conversation, I was still scared shitless of Brando. So I called him and said I wanted to explore the role with him. At which point he jumped in and said he wasn't entirely sure he could play the role, and if he couldn't, he shouldn't, so why not get together and try it out? Wonderful, I said, let's videotape it. Fine, he said.

PLAYBOY: So he never really agreed to take the screen test?

COPPOLA: No. But he's a fantastic guy, so I'm sure if I'd been up front with him and told him the spot I was in, he'd have done it.

PLAYBOY: How did the non–screen test go?

COPPOLA: I got a video recorder from some friends and showed up at Brando's house the next morning with a photographer and an Italian barber I'd already picked for the role of Bonasera, the undertaker in the film. I'd dressed him in a black suit and asked him to memorize the speech at the beginning of the movie, where Bonasera asks the Godfather for a favor. But I kept him outside. Brando met us in his living room, wearing a Japanese kimono, hair tied back in a ponytail. I just started video-taping him. He began to slide into character. He took some shoe polish and put it in his hair. His speech changed: "You t'ink I need a mustache?" I was anxious to make an intelligent comment, so I said, "Oh, yeah, my Uncle Louis has a mustache." He dabbed on a phony mustache and, as I video-taped him, he reached for some Kleenex. "I want to be like bulldog," he mumbled, and stuffed wads of it into his mouth. He kept talking to himself, mumbling, and finally said, "I just wanna improvise." I told my guys to keep quiet; I'd heard that noise bothers him. He always wears earplugs when he's working.

Then, without warning, I ushered in my barber friend, who went up to Brando and launched right into his speech. Brando didn't know what was going on for a moment, but he listened and then just started doing the scene. It was my shot. The thing worked, I had it down on tape. I'd watched 47-year-old Marlon Brando turn into this aging Mafia chief. It was fantastic.

Later, when I showed the tape to Evans and Jaffe, their reaction—and this is where I give them credit—was instantaneous. They both said he was great.

PLAYBOY: How was it, working with Brando?

COPPOLA: Well, we all wanted to impress Brando with the fact that each of us was special in some way or other. Jimmy Caan was always trying to make him laugh, Al Pacino would be moody and try to impress him with his intensity, and when Marlon would sit down to talk about Indians or politics, Duvall would sit behind him and do Brando imitations. I got along very well with Marlon. One of the most affectionate, warm men I've ever known. He'd come in late once in a while, but he'd make up for it with his sense of humor.

PLAYBOY: What's an example of his sense of humor?

COPPOLA: Besides "mooning" actors on the set? Well, there's this scene in Godfather I where they've brought Brando home from the hospital, and the orderlies are supposed to carry him up the stairs in a stretcher. The actors couldn't manage it, so I asked a couple of muscle-bound guys on the set—real physical-fitness types—to do it. They bragged that it would be no problem for them; so while they were off being costumed and made up, Brando got the other guys to load the stretcher with 1,000 pounds of lead weights. So these two guys swagger out, pick up the weighted stretcher with Brando on it—and don't let on that they can hardly lift the thing. Well, about four steps up, they both yell, "Jee-sus, does he weigh a ton!" and they drop the stretcher, which breaks up everybody on the set. That sort of thing went on all the time.

PLAYBOY: Was it all as much fun as that?

COPPOLA: No, that's hindsight. If you'd checked with the crew while we were filming, they'd have said The Godfather was going to be the biggest disaster of all time. The French Connection came out while we were filming, and people who'd seen the film and who saw the Godfather rushes implied that our film was boring by comparison. There were rumors that I was going to be fired every day. I was trying to save money during that time, sacking out on Jimmy Caan's couch. A bad period for me. I couldn't get to sleep at night. When I did, I had nightmares of seeing Elia Kazan walk onto the set, come up to me and say, "Uh, Francis, I've been asked to…." But Marlon was a great help. When I mentioned the threatening noises, he told me he wouldn't continue the picture if I got fired.

PLAYBOY: Were you given your head by the studio, were you allowed to improvise or did you have to stick faithfully to the script?

COPPOLA: I wasn't given my head, by any means. A lot of the en

ergy that went into the film went into simply trying to convince the people who held the power to let me do the film my way. But there was some spontaneity. For instance, Lenny Montana, who plays Luca Brasi, the mafioso in the picture who calls on the Godfather to thank him for being invited to the wedding—that's before he gets his hand pinned to a bar with a knife, of course—is not a professional actor, and he was terrified of playing the scene with Brando. We shot the scene a dozen times, but he froze on every take and forgot his lines. We finally gave up. Later, I wrote a new little scene where he was at the party, before his visit to the Godfather, practicing his speech perfectly over and over. We shot that and kept one of the scenes with Brando where Brasi froze, and it made the whole thing work well with the context of the story.

As for Brando himself, what an improviser! I told him at one point that I didn't really know how to shoot his final scene, just before he dies. What could we do to make his playing with his grandson believable? He said, "Here's how I play with kids," and took an orange peel, cut it into pieces that looked like fangs and slipped them into his mouth.

PLAYBOY: Orange peel along with the Kleenex?

COPPOLA: Right. And I thought, what a ridiculous idea. Then suddenly I saw it: Of course! The Godfather dies as a monster! And once I'd seen him with the orange-peel fangs, I knew I could never shoot it any other way.

PLAYBOY: How about Pacino, who really had the major role in both movies? How was he cast?

COPPOLA: We were ready to go into production before we found our Michael Corleone. The studio guys wanted Jimmy Caan to play him. I love Jimmy, but I felt he'd be wrong for Michael—and perfect for Sonny. Other people suggested Robert Redford, Warren Beatty, Jack Nicholson, Ryan O'Neal. But all I could see was Al Pacino's face in that camera. I couldn't get him out of my head. Even when I read the book, I kept seeing him as Michael. I nearly got fired over insisting on him, but it worked out in the end.

PLAYBOY: That's an understatement. After The Godfather went on to unparalleled success, what got you interested in doing a sequel?

COPPOLA: Initially, the idea of a sequel seemed horrible to me. It sounded like a tacky spin-off, and I used to joke that the only way I'd do it was if they'd let me film Abbott and Costello Meet the Godfather—that would have been fun. Then I entertained some Russian film executives who were visiting San Francisco and they asked me if I was going to make The Godfather Part II. That was the first time I heard the phrase used; I guess you could say I stole the title from the Russians.

In short, it seemed like such a terrible idea that I began to be intrigued by the thought of pulling it off. Simple as that. Sometimes I sit around thinking I'd like to get a job directing a TV soap opera, just to see if I could make it the most wonderful thing of its kind ever done. Or I imagine devoting myself to directing the plays of a cub-scout troop and having it be the most exciting theater in the country. You know that feeling when something seems so outrageous, you just have to do it? That's what happened to me.

Then after I started thinking about the idea, when I considered that we'd have most of the same actors, the scenes we might be able to develop in depth, I started feeling it really might be something innovative.

PLAYBOY: Do you, like some critics, think Godfather II is a better film than Godfather I?

COPPOLA: The second film goes much further than the first one. It's much more ambitious and novelistic in its structure. If you get off on the wrong foot with it, I can imagine that it would be like a Chinese water torture to sit through it. But it's a more subtle movie, with its own heartbeat. And it was very tough on some of the actors, especially Al Pacino.

PLAYBOY: Is it true that you had to stop shooting for two or three weeks when you were on location in Santo Domingo because Pacino was exhausted?

COPPOLA: Yes. The role of Michael is a very strange and difficult one and it put a terrific strain on him. It was like being caught in a kind of vise. In the first picture, he went from being a young, slightly insecure, naïve and brilliant young college student to becoming this horrible Mafia killer. In Godfather II, he's the same man from beginning to end—working on a much more subtle level, very rarely having a big climactic scene where an actor can unload, like blowing the spittle out of the tube of a trombone. The entire performance had to be kind of vague and so understated that, as an actor, you couldn't really be sure what you were doing. You had the tremendous pressure of not knowing whether your performance would have a true, cumulative effect, whether you were creating a monster or just being terrible. The load on Al was terrific and it really ran him down physically.

PLAYBOY: You obviously had a lot more control over Godfather II than Godfather I, didn't you?

COPPOLA: Absolutely. I had to fight a lot of wars the first time around. In Godfather II, I had no interference. Paramount backed me up in every decision. The film was my baby and they left it in my hands.

PLAYBOY: It would have been stupid of them not to, after all the money the first one made.

COPPOLA: But Paramount was fully aware of some of the chances I was taking and went along. I guess they had to, but they did.

PLAYBOY: One of the most important areas you explore in Godfather II is the connection between Mafia operations and some of our legitimate big-business interests. Are you saying that some corporations are no better and no worse than organized crime?

COPPOLA: Right from the very beginning it became clear, as I was doing my research, that though the Mafia was a Sicilian phenomenon, there was no way it could really have flowered except in the soil of America. America was absolutely ripe for the Mafia. Everything the Mafia believed in and was set up to handle—absolute control, the carving out of territories, the rigging of prices and the elimination of competition—everything was here. In fact, the corporate philosophy that built some of our biggest industries and great personal fortunes was a Mafia philosophy. So when those Italians arrived here, they found themselves in the perfect place.

It became clear to me that there was a wonderful parallel to be drawn, that the career of Michael Corleone was the perfect metaphor for the new land. Like America, Michael began as a clean, brilliant young man endowed with incredible resources and believing in a humanistic idealism. Like America, Michael was the child of an older system, a child of Europe. Like America, Michael was an innocent who had tried to correct the ills and injustices of his progenitors. But then he got blood on his hands. He lied to himself and to others about what he was doing and why. And so he became not only the mirror image of what he'd come from but worse. One of the reasons I wanted to make Godfather II is that I wanted to take Michael to what I felt was the logical conclusion. He wins every battle; his brilliance and his resources enable him to defeat all his enemies. I didn't want Michael to die. I didn't want Michael to be put into prison. I didn't want him to be assassinated by his rivals. But, in a bigger sense, I also wanted to destroy Michael. There's no doubt that, by the end of this picture, Michael Corleone, having beaten everyone, is sitting there alone, a living corpse.

PLAYBOY: Is that your metaphor for America today?

COPPOLA: Unlike America, Michael Corleone is doomed. There's no way that man is ever going to change. I admit I considered some upbeat touch at the end, like having his son turn against him to indicate he wouldn't follow in that tradition, but honesty—and Pacino—wouldn't let me do it. Michael is doomed. But I don't at all feel that America is doomed. I thought it was healthy to make this horror-story statement—as a warning, if you like—but, as a nation, we don't have to go down

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that same road, and I don't think we will.

PLAYBOY: A number of critics feel that you and others—including, perhaps, PLAYBOY, with its series on organized crime—helped romanticize the Mafia in America. How do you respond to that?

COPPOLA: Well, first of all, the Mafia was romanticized in the book. And I was filming that book. To do a film about my real opinion of the Mafia would be another thing altogether. But it's a mistake to think I was making a film about the Mafia. Godfather Part I is a romance about a king with three sons. It is a film about power. It could have been the Kennedys. The whole idea of a family living in a compound—that was all based on Hyannisport. Remember, it wasn't a documentary about Mafia chief Vito Genovese. It was Marlon Brando with Kleenex in his mouth.

PLAYBOY: Where do the films depart most radically from the truth?

COPPOLA: Where you get into the mythic aspects of the Godfather, the great father who is honorable and will not do business in drugs. The character was a synthesis of Genovese and Joseph Profaci, but Genovese ordered his soldiers not to deal in drugs while he himself did just that on the side; Profaci was dishonorable at a lot of levels. The film Godfather would never double-cross anyone, but the real godfathers double-crossed people over and over.

PLAYBOY: Still, you won't deny that, whatever your intentions, Godfather I had the effect of romanticizing the Mafia?

COPPOLA: I felt I was making a harsh statement about the Mafia and power at the end of Godfather I when Michael murders all those people, then lies to his wife and closes the door. But obviously, many people didn't get the point I was making. And so if the statement I was trying to make was outbalanced by the charismatic aspects of the characters, I felt Godfather II was an opportunity to rectify that. The film is pretty rough. The essence of Godfather I is all Mario Puzo's creation, not mine. With Godfather II, which I had a greater part in writing, I emerged a bit to comment on the first film.

"America was absolutely ripe for the mafia. Everything the Mafia believed in was here. In fact, the corporate philosophy that build some of our biggest industries was a Mafia philosophy."

But the fact still may be that people like Marlon and Jimmy and Al too much. If you were taken inside Adolf Hitler's home, went to his parties and heard his stories, you'd probably have liked him. If I made a film of Hitler and got some charismatic actor to play him, people would say I was trying to make him a good human being. He wasn't, of course, but the greatest evil on Earth is done by sane human beings who are miserable in themselves. My point is that you can't make a movie about what it's like inside a Mafia family without their seeming to be quite human.

PLAYBOY: What about those who say not that the Mafia is romanticized but that it simply doesn't exist?

COPPOLA: When people say the Mafia doesn't exist, in a way they're right. When they say it does exist, they're right too. You have to look at it with different eyes: It's not a secret Italian organization, as it's portrayed. The most powerful man in the Mafia at one time wasn't Italian—he was a Jew. Meyer Lansky became powerful because he was the best at forging their common interests—that's just good business practice.

PLAYBOY: Except that, as far as we know, AT&T hasn't killed anyone in pursuit of its business.

COPPOLA: Who says? Who says?

PLAYBOY: Have you got something on AT&T?

COPPOLA: AT&T I don't know about, but ITT in Chile? I wouldn't bet my life that it hadn't. And it's not just business. How about the Yablonski murders in that coal miners' union? That was just the union equivalent of a Mafia hit. How about politics? Assassination of a president is the quickest way to bring about lasting and enormous social change. What's the difference between the United States's putting a guy like Trujillo in power so our companies can operate in the Dominican Republic and the Mafia's handing the Boston territory to one of its capos? Then, after 20 years, either guy gets a little uppity and either organization feels free to knock him off.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any stories to tell about how the real Mafia reacted to the Godfather films?

COPPOLA: No.

PLAYBOY: And you wouldn't tell if you had any?

COPPOLA: No, I would. But the fact is I got some terrific advice from Mario Puzo. He told me that, in his experience, Mafia guys loved the glamor of show business and that, if you let them, they'd get involved. So Mario told me that I'd probably be contacted and when I was, I should refuse to open up to them. I shouldn't take their phone number, I shouldn't let them feel they could visit me. Because if there's one thing about them, it's that they respect that attitude. If you turn them off, they won't intrude into your life. Al Ruddy, the producer, was out having dinner with a lot of them, but I wouldn't participate in any way whatsoever with them.

Funny thing is. I've never been very interested in the Mafia—even though some important guys in the Mob have the same name as I do. "Trigger Mike" Coppola was one of Vito Genovese's lieutenants, I think. Terrible man.

PLAYBOY: Any relation?

COPPOLA: You mean Uncle Mike? No, of course not. Coppola is a common Italian name.

PLAYBOY: One Hollywood person who has been mentioned in connection with the Mafia is Frank Sinatra. How are your relations with him, considering that most people believe he was the model for Johnny Fontane, the singer-actor in The Godfather?

COPPOLA: I met Sinatra several times before filming started. They were very friendly meetings, since I never liked the idea of exploiting a fictionalization of a man, any man—and I told him so. I let him know that I didn't like that part of the book and that I'd minimize it in the film. Sinatra was very appreciative. Then he turned to me and said, "I'd like to play the Godfather."

PLAYBOY: What?

COPPOLA: It's true. He said, "Let's you and me buy this goddamned book and make it ourselves." I said, "Well, it sounds great, but…."

PLAYBOY: Didn't Sinatra yell at Puzo once when they met in a restaurant?

COPPOLA: That incident was caused by some guy trying to make points with Sinatra by introducing the two of them very provocatively. Puzo never meant to embarrass him in person, and he told me he thought Sinatra behaved very understandably, considering the way they were introduced. But the fact remains that Mario, who is a very fine writer, was going broke with several good novels out, so he set

out to write the biggest best seller in history. He was going to do anything he had to in order to get off the merry-go-round. So he wrote the perfect commercial book. And exploiting celebrities like Sinatra was something he felt he had to do. In the film, the Sinatra character plays a very small role. I'd have cut it out altogether if I'd had the power.

PLAYBOY: Godfather II was supposedly cut down from almost six hours. What did we miss?

COPPOLA: My heart was really in the Little Italy sequences, in the old streets of New York, the music, all that turn-of-the-century atmosphere. I had great scenes in the script that we couldn't include in the movie: There was one where Enrico Caruso showed up in the neighborhood and sang "Over There" to get guys to enlist for World War I; I had scenes of Italians building the subways, of young Vito courting his girl and joining his friends for music and mandolins and wine. But it all got too long and too expensive.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever considered recutting the movies into one giant film?

COPPOLA: It's an exciting thought, and it's just what I plan to do, believe it or not. In two years, I'm going to take both pictures, look over all the outtakes and recut them any way I want to, into one film. You don't often do that, because there's a certain inertia: Once a film is done, it's done, and you tend not to want to open things up again.

I've had an idea for a film I want to make, which I'd call Remake. I'd buy a film—any film—decide what I felt about it, then recut it, maybe shoot some things and make it into a whole new work.

PLAYBOY: Some critics have charged that in cutting Godfather II, you gave the picture a jerky, disjointed quality.

COPPOLA: Oh, they're full of baloney. They think a movie has to be what the last four movies were. There isn't a critic out there who knows what he's talking about. There may be three. Most are special-interest critics.

PLAYBOY: Meaning?

COPPOLA: Meaning that there's a lot of extortion and blackmail practiced by critics. A lot of them force the filmmaker to participate in certain things that accrue to the critics' advantage under the implied threat of a bad review.

PLAYBOY: Can you be more specific?

COPPOLA: No, because of course I'm not saying they're all that way. But suffice it to say that if this sort of extortion continues, it may blow up in the biggest scandal the field of criticism has known. It's corrupt right down to the bottom. And I'm speaking as one who has enjoyed generally good favor from the critics.

PLAYBOY: Which critics do you admire?

COPPOLA: Pauline Kael of The New Yorker. When she writes about a film, she does it in depth. When I make a bad picture, I expect her to blast me higher than a kite and I'll be grateful for that. I like Time's Jay Cocks, who's a friend; Steven Farber and Playboy's Bruce Williamson, who have liked some of my films; and Stanley Kauffmann of the New Republic, who often hasn't.

PLAYBOY: Your last three films, Godfather I and II and The Conversation, have been negative. Does that mean you've become more of a pessimist about life?

COPPOLA: Really, I'm not a negative person. Just the opposite. Starting now, I'm going to try to let the other side of me be more evident in my movies. It's funny, but I've noticed that very often film makers reflect things in their movies that are the opposite of what they really feel. I know some men whose films are highly sexual but who lead very tame home lives.

PLAYBOY: Why, in both Godfather films, are your female characters so submissive and acquiescent?

COPPOLA: That was how the women were represented in the original book and, from what I know, it was the role of women in the Mafia fabric. In Godfather Part II, I was interested in developing a more contemporary, political view of women in the person of his wife, Kay, and in her symbolic statement of power when she had her unborn son killed.

PLAYBOY: If Kay was such a liberated and defiant woman, why did it take her so long to leave Michael when she was no longer happy with him?

COPPOLA: It may seem like a long time, but actually they're together only six or seven years. How many people do we know who stay together unhappily for 15 years or more before they finally split? Also, during the 1950s, there were a lot of forces that tended to keep men and women together way beyond the point when they should have parted. Think of how many husbands have kept their wives and held their families together by promising that things would change just as soon as they became vice presidents or had R1,731,400.00 in the bank or closed a big deal. I've strung my own wife along for 13 years by telling her that as soon as I was done with this or that project, I'd stop working so hard and we'd live a more normal life. I mean, that's the classic way husbands lie. Often the lies aren't even intentional. And it's easy to string a woman along for years by doing exactly that. Michael lies to Kay in that way and she believes him at first—because she wants to believe him.

PLAYBOY: Why do people tend to get sucked in by their own lies? Do they just sell out to the system?

COPPOLA: Well, people like myself, who decide that it's necessary to work within a system in order to be able either to change it or eventually to go off on their own to subsidize the kind of work they believe in, inevitably become changed by the process, if they go along with it. I know a lot of bright young writers and directors in Hollywood who are very successful—some of them I gave jobs to four or five years ago—and they're making a lot of money; but they're no longer talking about the things they used to talk about. Their conversation now is all about deals, about what's going to sell and what isn't. And they rave about their new cars and their new R6,925,500.00 houses. They don't even see or hear the changes in themselves. They've become the very people they were criticizing three years ago. Like Michael, they've become their fathers.

PLAYBOY: You don't think the same thing could happen to you?

COPPOLA: Sure, it could happen to me. One of the reasons I live here and not in Los Angeles is that I'm trying to keep my bearings. I have nothing against Los Angeles; it's a terrific center of talent right now, with the finest actors and certainly the best musicians and top people in every area, but there's always been a kind of collective madness that takes place in Hollywood, and it's very attractive and seductive, but you could lose yourself in it.

PLAYBOY: With the power and authority you wield, do you find it hard to keep a grip on your ego?

COPPOLA: Well, I'm 36 now, but I directed my first play in 1956—which is nearly 20 years ago—so I haven't been overwhelmed by power overnight. But sure, everyone has that problem. Let me give you an example: Al Ruddy, who's a nice guy but who's more of a wheeler-dealer than I am, used to walk onto the Godfather set now and then to suggest that an actor wear a hat for such and such a scene. I'd say, "No, I already thought this scene out. Thanks, anyway." And no sooner would the sentence be out of my mouth than I'd think, fuck it, he's right, the actor should be wearing a hat. But I wouldn't, or couldn't, change it. If it had been George Lucas or someone like that, I'd have accepted the suggestion. But there are some people you can't take criticism from, perhaps because you feel threatened.

PLAYBOY: How would you feel threatened?

COPPOLA: The artist's worst fear is that he'll be exposed as a sham. I've heard it from actors, directors, everyone. I remember hearing Peter Sellers say, "Someday they're going to uncover me and realize I'm just a fake." Deep down, we're all living with the notion that our success is beyond our ability. In the last couple of years, I've

grown more confident that I have ideas, that I can solve problems. That's as much as I'll give myself for now.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever feel uneasy about the power you have to influence other people's minds through film—or in other ways?

COPPOLA: I had a thought about that, a little fantasy that goes like this: I'm getting to be an influential person in San Francisco; what if I and five other powerful guys with cigars got together in a smoke-filled room to decide who would be the next mayor of San Francisco? We do it because we're good guys and we really want the city to be wonderful for everybody. Then I thought, what's the difference between five good guys holding that kind of power and five bad guys? Just good intentions, and intentions can be corrupted. And it's not just, say, in the political field. Let me make a statement about power: From now on, I'm determined to give tremendous thought to the impact any project I undertake will have on the public. It may sound wordy, it may sound obvious, but very few film makers ever really do that.

PLAYBOY: Did you think that way about The Godfather?

COPPOLA: No. How could I? I've spoken about the circumstances surrounding that project. But if the picture seems to some to be irresponsible because it celebrates violence, that was never my intent. In fact, there's very little actual violence in the film. It occurs very quickly. It's just that the violence happens to characters you like. If I were to roast 50 people alive in The Towering Inferno, it would be less horrible than shooting up a guy you've come to know and believe in. I once saw a fistfight in a New York restaurant that was modest by movie standards. But I'd never seen anything so frightening; they were real people.

PLAYBOY: How will this determination to consider public impact affect your next film?

COPPOLA: My next project is going to be delicate in that context. It's going to be a film about Vietnam, although it won't necessarily be political—it will be about war and the human soul. But it's dangerous, because I'll be venturing into an area that is laden with so many implications that if I select some aspects and ignore others, I may be doing something irresponsible. So I'll be thinking hard about it.

People are hungry for film now, susceptible to it because it reaches them on an emotional level. We're living in a time when things are changing quickly: Zip, there went the Catholic Church; zoom, that was the traditional family unit you just saw go by. People aren't sure of what they are feeling or what to believe in, so film can be a very influential medium now. Millions of people watched The Godfather around the world, each person spending three hours in a dark theater. Imagine how valuable that time with them is. It's priceless, and yet a filmmaker has it. I think that's an extraordinary thing.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel that Hollywood directors in the past have been irresponsible in propagating stereotypes, in exerting the wrong kind of influence over the public?

COPPOLA: Perhaps to some extent, but American films have followed the stereotypes, not set them. I read somewhere recently that the American film was responsible for our view of what an Indian was. But it isn't. The American film merely echoed and amplified the image that already existed in the national consciousness. It reinforced attitudes people already had about Indians when they first came here. The people who write films and the people who direct them have also been programmed. That isn't to say we shouldn't have the courage to try to break the mold, but it takes more courage and more originality than most people have.

PLAYBOY: Isn't Hollywood much more open to new ideas, new ways of doing things than it used to be?

COPPOLA: Yes, but it's chaotic. There's no leadership, maybe because the country itself has no leadership, either. Making movies is a great, complex, writhing crap game. No one is running anything and the only priority is the one that's become uppermost in America today: to make a profit.

PLAYBOY: When you started out in your career, did you have to do work you were ashamed of, just to make a profit?

COPPOLA: Well, I've done some stuff that hasn't worked out too well. But I never took on anything with the attitude that it was going to be terrible. It may have turned out that way, but I thought it was great while I was doing it. I was worried about certain films, though. I was worried while I was making them that things were going wrong and I didn't have the power to change them. During the shooting of Finian's Rainbow at Warner's years ago, I was brought in to direct a project that had already been cast and structured. I was also working in a big studio, in a methodology I didn't understand very well and over which I had no control. I'd express some doubts about the way things were going, and the people around me would say, "It's going great." I'll never get myself caught in that kind of situation again, because I now surround myself with people whose taste I respect and who have the right to hit all the sour notes they want. We had no sour notes on Finian's Rainbow; everyone kept saying how terrific everything was all the time. They were sincere; their motives were pure. But today I try to work with people who won't hesitate to say, "We're making a mistake." And if after thinking about it I agree with them, we stop and make changes. The one good thing I'd say about the old Hollywood, however autocratic and restrictive it may have been, is that you really got opinions from people who weren't afraid to give them and you always knew where you stood.

> "As I video-taped him. Brando reached for some Kleenex. 'I want to be like bulldog,' he mumbled, and stuffed wads of it into his mouth. I watched this 47-year-old man turn into an aging Mafia chief."

PLAYBOY: You mean from men such as Harry Colin and Louis B. Mayer, the men who used to run the studios?

COPPOLA: Yes, and Darryl Zanuck and David Selznick and all the others. People weren't afraid to back up their opinions. Today everything is very confused and people kind of float around amorphously. Nobody backs up his hunches. There are a handful of directors today who have total authority and deserve it. And then there are a lot of other directors who really ought to be working with strong producers and strong writers, but they all think they're Stanley Kubrick. The auteur theory is fine, but to exercise it you have to qualify, and the only way you can qualify is by having earned the right to have control, by having turned out a series of really incredibly good films. Some men have it and some men don't. I don't feel that one or two hits or one or two beautiful films entitle anyone to that much control. A lot of very promising directors have been destroyed by it. It's a big dilemma, of course, because, unfortunately, the authority these days is almost always shared with people who have no business being

producers and studio executives. With one or two exceptions, there's no one running the studios who's qualified, either, so you have a vacuum, and the director has to fill it.

PLAYBOY: Then Hollywood today isn't as good a place to make movies as it was when it was dominated by the big studios?

COPPOLA: There are maybe 10,000 of the finest actors in the world living in Hollywood, and there are fine writers and all kinds of talented people, but it's a sad, pent-up place. The actors are frustrated; they don't feel they have anywhere to work. When good actors say work, they mean work that uses the best of their talent, that uses them fully and creatively. And the truth of the matter is that there is nowhere to work that way these days. So they become petulant, they become depressed and they hate themselves for it. I feel that the film business today, with its tremendous potential to make profits, with a huge new audience of people all over the world who love to go to the movies, should be providing not only a product, something it can sell, but a hospitable place for creative people to work. Now, at a time when we stand on the eve of incredible profits, to think that no money, no percentage of any money is being used to provide a really stimulating place for actors and writers and directors to work, that all the energy is going into nothing but deal-making, well, that's incredible to me. L.A. ought to be the acting and theater and film capital of the world, but nothing is happening.

PLAYBOY: Do you think you can make something happen with your own company?

COPPOLA: What I'm talking about can't be accomplished by a little company like mine. It would take a major company to really grab this thing by the tail.

PLAYBOY: There are rumors that you actually were offered control of a major studio.

COPPOLA: Really? Where'd you hear that?

PLAYBOY: From several people. Is it true?

COPPOLA: Let's say that I was approached by certain people and there were discussions, but that's all. Look, I must be honest with you. I've just finished a film and I'm 36. I have a good future in front of me and I'm trying to figure out what's the most exciting, positive way to go on working in films, and taking over a studio might have been a way. But as I see things now, that would take so much energy that I'm not sure it'd be worth it. I mean, if I were running a studio, it might take me 100 BTUs worth of energy to bend something a quarter inch; if I stay independent and use my own resources, those 100 BTUs could bend something a foot. I think events can make the decision for you, though. If someone were to come up to me and offer me the most incredible film company in history and say, "Do what you want, we're behind you," then I'd interpret that as a cosmic indication that I should do it.

But look: The average executive of a movie studio may make R2,597,100.00 a year, and have a corresponding power over his company. As a film artist, I make much, much more than that and, consequently, have that much more power over my company. I've already made a million dollars for directing a film. So what do I do—ask for a million and a half? Perhaps the wisest thing to do is to use all my energies to make a film that grosses some stupendous amount, then go out and buy a major company and change it from the top. But I don't know. As soon as you become that big, you get absorbed.

PLAYBOY: You mean absorbed into a corporate structure?

COPPOLA: Yes, and not just in the movie business. Traditionally, our greatest heroes have been creators and inventors. A hundred years ago, what we paraded before the world was something called Yankee ingenuity. Every one of our great cartels and corporations was started by—that is, the original impulse came from—an Andrew Carnegie or a Thomas Edison or a Henry Ford, guys who used their inventive genius to create something better. And we made the best products in the world! And what those men created evolved into cartels, with their rules of property and profit. By the 1940s, after the United States had demonstrated that the ultimate result of this ingenuity was our emergence as the most powerful nation in the world, we were being run by huge, entrenched institutions completely hostile to that kind of inventiveness. By 1941, Henry Ford couldn't have built his cheap car. We might have had a Henry Ford in the 1940s. His name was Preston Tucker.

Tucker designed a car that could be built for a fraction of the kind of money the major companies were spending on their new models. It was a safe car, a revolutionary car in terms of engineering and it was a beautiful car. In every way, it was a much better machine than the stuff the major companies were offering, the companies created by Ford and the others. But Tucker was called a fraud and he was destroyed. If he were alive today, he'd be hired by one of the major car companies and his inventions would be shelved or filtered out to the public as the company deemed economically prudent. Not to benefit the public but the company, and only the company. I'm going to make a film of Tucker's story someday.

PLAYBOY: Many of the opinions you've expressed to us, including this one, reflect the antiestablishment views of the radical movement. Are you politically active?

COPPOLA: No. Politically, no one knows what I am, including me. I have a lot of very articulate, super-radical friends who criticize me for living in a big, expensive house; they apparently believe the world would be a better place if I moved into a shack. I notice, though, that, like me, they send their children to private schools. You see, I believe everybody should live in a nice house. I also believe in public education; until last year, I had my own kids in public schools, but I decided I wasn't going to sacrifice my children to an egalitarian ideal. The public schools in this city and all over the country are bad. I refuse to make my children guinea pigs to some social ideal, so I'm not going to send them to our crappy schools anymore. The whole school system has to be changed in this country. Just believing in certain things or giving your own money away isn't going to change anything.

PLAYBOY: What have you done yourself to help bring about change?

COPPOLA: In a self-sacrificing, personal way, probably nothing. Look, if someone announced next year that everyone should put all of his money in escrow and that we'd elect a board of men and women guided by the highest humanistic principles to administer the money to build homes and parks and educational centers for everyone, I'd do it in a minute. A lot of people would. But if half of the people in the world gave up their money and half didn't, the givers would be exploited by the keepers. Wealth is the only protection in a society that works on a system of property, of exploiter and exploitee. So that if I gave up what I earn, it wouldn't really improve anyone else's situation as much as it would deteriorate mine. There's no middle ground. If you have money, you're an exploiter; if you don't, you're exploited. We're in a fish tank in which there are only fish who eat and others who are eaten. If that's the only choice I'm offered, then I hope to be a fish that eats. We have to drain the tank and get into a newer, higher system altogether.

PLAYBOY: You certainly have the money now to afford beautiful things, and you've bought plenty of them. You also seem to have a craving for gadgets and expensive toys, like the R865,700.00 Mercedes you own. What kind of things do you like to spend money on?

COPPOLA: I've spent money on my house because I need space and because I want to enjoy my family. I've found that there are some things money can buy that truly make life more pleasant and give you more time to do the things that are really important, such as your work. When I was very young, I thought I needed a lot of things, but I've discovered that the more I have, the less I need. I've had terrific sports cars in my day, so now I drive a Honda car—not

to be cute or anything like that but because I really like it. An XKE pulls up alongside and the guy looks at me in my little Honda. Nothing happens. I'm not jealous, because I've had that other car, I know I could have one and I don't need it anymore. There's something about possessions, living wealth, that really has to do with trying to prove something to yourself. My lifestyle is going to get simpler and simpler with the coming years.

PLAYBOY: What about that Mercedes?

COPPOLA: I didn't buy it. It was a gift, and I hardly ever use it. I also own a private jet. When I bought it, it was because I had once thought, "Wow, wouldn't it be crazy to have a private jet!" I do a lot of things and live in the same fantasy spirit that I write in. It's all make-believe to me. It's a fairy tale and I get to do all the things I can imagine. But I find that as I actually do them, I don't need them anymore. If I keep the private jet, it will be because I've found it useful. Even when I began buying things, I'd take whatever I'd bought out of the box and often I'd realize immediately that I really didn't need it or want it. I gave a lot of things away to people as presents, things I'd bought for myself the day before.

PLAYBOY: What does make you happy, besides your work?

COPPOLA: What brings me the greatest joy is the company of nice people and to be able to go through all the rituals with them, to eat dinner with them, cook with them, talk with them. I'm very European in that respect.

PLAYBOY: Do you have a lot of people around all the time?

COPPOLA: No. My wife is a very private person, which is probably why I'm still married to her, because I'm a big consumer of things and people, but I know I can't consume her, so I could never get tired of her.

PLAYBOY: Is she a big influence on your life?

COPPOLA: No, I can't say that. Everybody's wife is a big influence, but I don't want to give the mistaken impression that she's the quiet conceptualizer of my life. I discuss things with her and I think she's really bright and I respect her values a lot. She's not interested at all in money or material objects. She's interested in ideas. The best definition I can give you of my wife is that she's an impossible person to buy a present for, because there's nothing she wants. You know what I once gave her for Christmas? The kids were opening their presents and I went into the other room and made her a cappuccino, put it in a box, wrapped it up, brought it out and gave it to her. To this day, she maintains it's the best present she ever got, because she really wanted that cup of coffee. That's the way she is.

PLAYBOY: Generally speaking, what kind of women do you like to have around you?

COPPOLA: I've always enjoyed being around women older than myself. My wife is three years older than I am. I'm very attracted to intelligent women.

PLAYBOY: A lot of men in the movie industry use their power and their status as celebrities to play around sexually. Have you ever been tempted along those lines?

COPPOLA: I'd like to point out that it's not only the men who play around, as you put it. I know a female casting executive who uses her position just as a man might. It's incredible how this woman operates. She uses her position to keep five or six men going at one time and she's just as exploitive of her position as any man might be. I'm convinced that men and women are basically very similar in many more respects than we've been brought up to believe. We've been taught so-called masculine roles, just as women have been programed into so called feminine ones. But the lines aren't so clearly drawn anymore, partly because of the women's movement. What I'm talking about has nothing to do with what people do in bed, necessarily. I know a great many heterosexual women who are very masculine in many ways, and many heterosexual men who are very feminine. I include myself among the latter and I always have.

PLAYBOY: Pardon us for mentioning it, but you didn't really answer our question about playing around. Would you rather not?

COPPOLA: What can I say? I love women. I can be walking down the street with my wife, and I'll see a beautiful woman and I'll pat my wife on the shoulder and say, "Hey, look at her?" But to some extent, the myth about famous movie directors' being pursued by women is not quite accurate. For one thing, there's so little time and so much work to be done. I once asked one of my assistants, who's always with beautiful girls, how he met so many of them. He said, "Easy; I tell them I'm going to introduce them to you." But he never does. And it would seem to me that although the life of a swinging bachelor might have some temporary appeal, it would be something that would run out pretty fast. I'm happy living with my wife and I enjoy the format of the traditional family. And I love kids. If I had my way, I'd have 10 of them. I've always been like that. One of my happiest summers was being a camp counselor. Even as a kid, I liked littler kids.

PLAYBOY: Were you happy as a kid?

COPPOLA: My childhood was very warm, very tempestuous, full of controversy and a lot of passion and shouting. My father, who is an enormously talented man, was the focus of all our lives, the three children and my mother. Our lives centered on what we all felt was the tragedy of his career. He was a very frustrated man, because, though he played first flute for the NBC Symphony under Toscanini, he felt that his own music never really emerged. I worked for Western Union one summer when I was 14 and, for some unknown reason—I still don't know why—I wrote up a phony telegram to my father telling him he'd landed a job writing the musical score for such and such a film. I signed it with the name of the guy who was in charge of music at Paramount Pictures. My father was overjoyed and yelled, "It's my break! It's my break!" And I had to tell him it wasn't true. He was heartbroken. Is that a terrible story?

Well, at least you know why I was so delirious when he shared the Oscar for best musical score with Nino Rota. Much of what is called source music—the compositions played by marching bands, performed on stage and so on—in both Godfathers is his, and I used him not because he's my father but because he's an excellent composer.

PLAYBOY: When you were younger, did you dream of success on a scale like this?

COPPOLA: I always dreamed, I always fantasized. While I was in college, I'd tell people I was going to be a famous director, I was going to be rich. People who knew me then tell me they felt it would happen. But I never really believed it would happen, not like this.

PLAYBOY: Would you say the success has come easily to you, or did you have to take risks?

COPPOLA: I've been taking small chances all along. I've always been a good gambler and I've never been afraid to take a chance. I don't think the risks I've taken have been that dramatic, but even so, there have been times when I've stuck my neck out and almost had my head chopped off. But ultimately, I've been rewarded. I've been treated very well by Hollywood. And I've been treated very well by this country. The main reason I've been treated well is that I have taken risks, and people have some respect for that.

Of course, when you gamble, sometimes you lose. It goes in streaks. When the streak goes your way, you build on it as fast as you can, utilizing their money, not yours. You try to catch your streak in anything.

PLAYBOY: One last question: You have said you'd never make a Godfather III. But is the story of Michael Corleone really over?

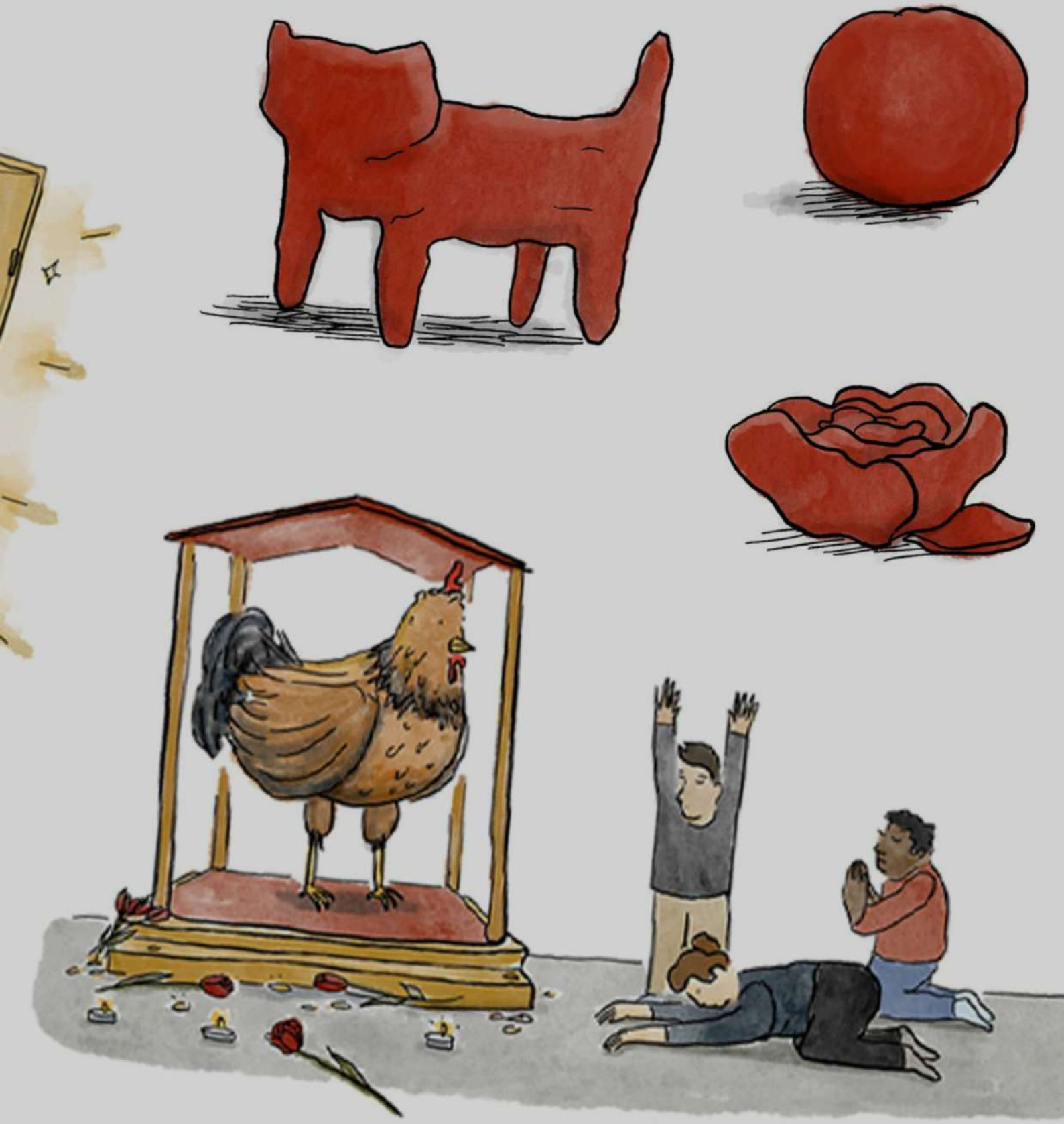
COPPOLA: Nine times out of 10, people who say they're never going to do something wind up doing it. Right now, I don't want to make another sequel. But maybe 30 years from now, when I and all the actors have gotten really old, then it might be fun to take another look.

Kinks I've Misconstrued

If you think doggy-style means begging for your dinner, you're in good company. Artist Natalie Dupille shares some very understandable misunderstandings

No, e-stim does not refer to the direct-deposit of your stimulus check. But if you got that wrong, you'll find no harsh judgment here—after all, when it comes to "sex words," there's plenty of room for "kinks" in your perception.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
NATALIE DUPILLE



BDSM:

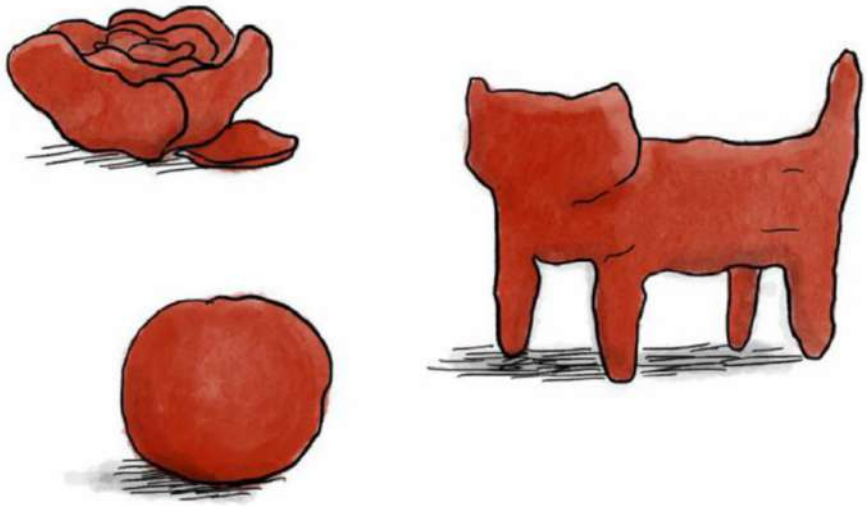
a nice, perfectly work-appropriate text acronym

GOLDEN SHOWERS:

gilded bathing chambers that I will never be able to afford

WAX PLAY:

the sculpting of discarded Babybel cheese casings

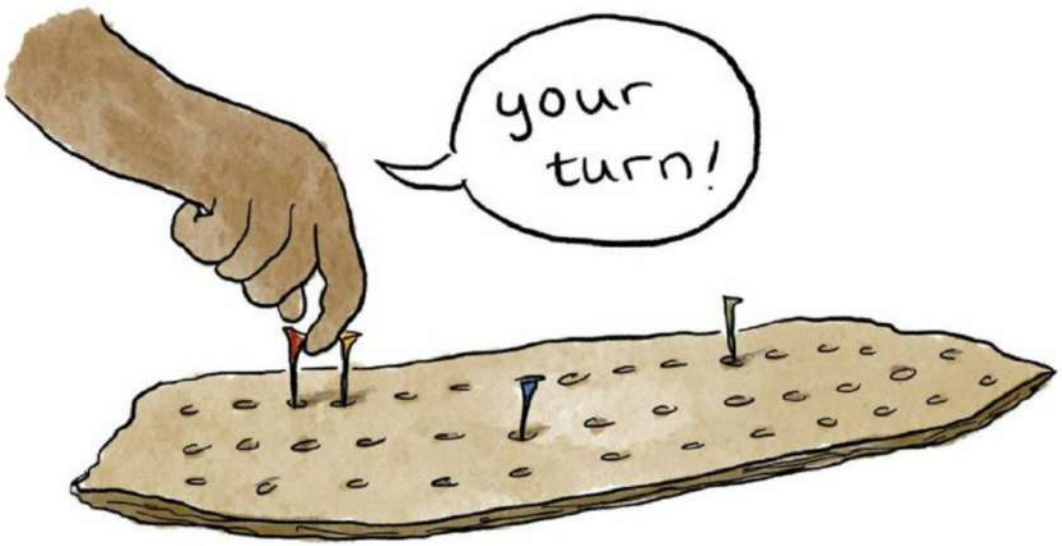


COCK WORSHIP:

a religion of fowl devotees

PEGGING:

a fun, cribbage-like board game activity



SPELUNKING:

not a kink, but really sounds like it should be one.

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Playboy Interview

Berry Gordy

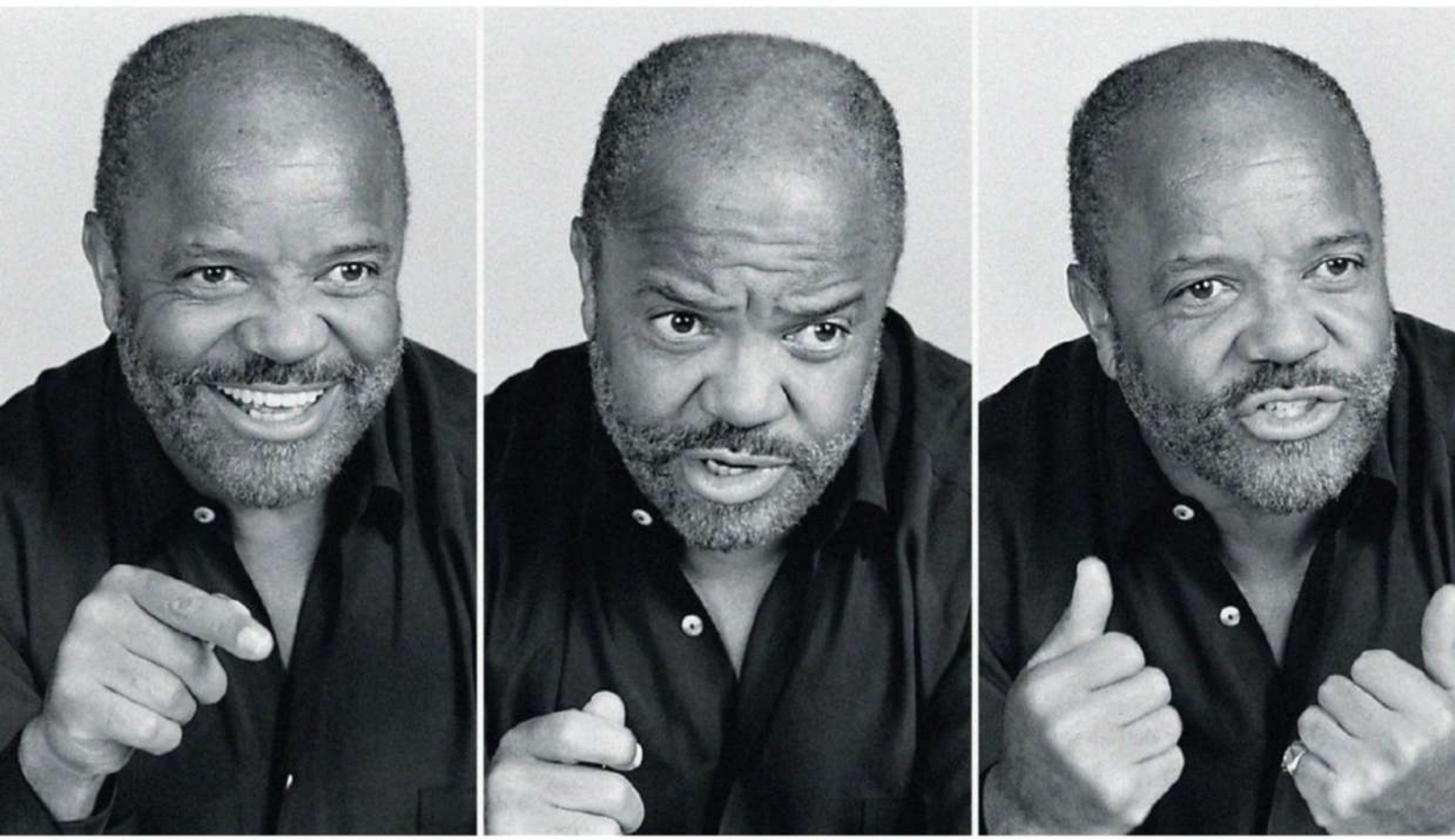
A candid conversation with the maestro of Motown about building an empire against all odds, clashing with Michael Jackson's father—and why he left all of it behind

INTERVIEW BY **DAVID SHEFF** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MIZUNO**

On the jacket of Berry Gordy Jr.'s autobiography, To Be Loved, are testimonials by some of the people who have been affected by him: Smokey Robinson, Dick Clark, David Geffen, Lee Iacocca, Barry Diller, Mike Ovitz, Sidney Poitier and Diana Ross. But Gordy's influence was not felt only by his peers in the entertainment and business worlds. There is hardly an adult anywhere in the world who doesn't recognize at least some of the music that came from Gordy's Motown Studios. As Clark says, "Berry's music, that Motown magic, provides the soundtrack of our lives."

A list of the artists who created that soundtrack reminds everyone what a potent musical force Motown was: the Four Tops, Marvin Gaye, the Jackson 5, the Marvelettes, Martha and the Vandellas, Lionel Richie, Smokey Robinson & the Miracles, the Supremes, the Temptations, Mary Wells, Stevie Wonder. For five weeks in 1968 and 1969 Motown artists held the top three spots on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. It would be an amazing achievement for any record company. But for Motown—whose acts were primarily African American and whose music captured America's urban essence—such success made history.

Motown was Berry Gordy, the enigmat-



ic, tenacious, revered and occasionally reviled mogul who launched the record company in his hometown of Detroit. Gordy also wrote many of the company's hits on his own or in collaboration with other Motown writers, discovered and nurtured the Motown acts, produced and arranged the records and was integral in the creation of the world-famous Motown sound. In addition, he acted as the stars' manager, agent and, often, surrogate father. He also oversaw Motown's marketing, manufacturing, sales, public relations, distribution, finances and whatever else came along.

Gordy founded Motown and his other record label, Tamla, in the late 1950s. The first record he released was one of his songs, "Come to Me," recorded by Marv Johnson. The R13,900.00 it cost came from a loan Gordy took from his family. Other records followed, the company grew and by the mid-'60s Motown was the hottest label in the world. The Beatles and Rolling Stones, among others, covered Motown songs, and the original versions sold millions of copies.

Motown enjoyed show business breakthroughs—the Supremes at the Copacabana, the Jackson 5 on the Ed Sullivan Show, Marvin Gaye's unforgettable performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the 1983 NBA All-Star Game—as well as some less pleasant moments. The Motortown Revue was traveling through the South when the bus that carried the performers was fired upon. At the same time, critics accused Gordy of selling out by making music that crossed over to whites. There were business setbacks too. Most notably, Motown was crippled by the defection of some of its key acts, including the Jackson 5 and in particular, Michael, who went solo and made the biggest-selling album in the history of the record business—for Epic Records, not Motown.

In the early 1970s Gordy moved his thriving company to Hollywood and into the movie business. Though the Motown film division never took off, there were a couple of artistic and commercial successes: Lady Sings the Blues, starring Diana Ross as Billie Holiday, and Mahogany, starring Ross and directed by Gordy. But Gordy was distracted by moviemaking, and changes were sweeping the record business. Distribution was being consolidated and costs were skyrocketing. Gordy got into financial trouble, particularly when other Motown acts—including Diana Ross and Marvin Gaye—deserted the company.

As his economic woes mounted, Gordy almost sold Motown in 1986 and two years later accepted a R1,100.00 million offer from MCA. Though Gordy was criticized for selling—Jesse Jackson, for one, felt he was letting down the black community—he claims he had no choice. Gordy retained his music publishing company, Jobete, which earns an estimated R350.00 million a year.

Money like that was unthinkable when Gordy was a child in Detroit. His parents were enterprising and hardworking, starting a number of businesses, including a grocery store, a plastering business, insurance sales and a Christmas tree lot. But making ends meet was hard, and at one point his father was forced to go on welfare.

Young Gordy planned to follow in the footsteps of his heroes, boxers Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson. Gordy was a promising featherweight, but he also enjoyed writing songs—despite the fact that novice composers have trouble paying the bills. He opened a record store and worked on an assembly line at a Lincoln-Mercury plant until he decided, at last, to devote himself to song-writing full-time. When he wanted more control over the production of his songs and realized he could make more money if he weren't paying so many middlemen, he decided to start his own record company. Motown was built in large part on Gordy's songs (including classics such as "You've Made Me So Very Happy" and "Money [*That's What I Want*]"), which were recorded by almost every one of the company's artists.

Motown and Gordy had more than their share of detractors. Throughout the years, the company was haunted by allegations that Gordy had cheated and manipulated his artists and that he was backed by the Mafia. He was married and divorced three times, has eight children, lived for a number of years with Playboy Playmate Lee Ann Michelle and had a long romance with Diana Ross. One of his ex-wives, Raynoma, wrote a book in which she accused him of cutting her out of Motown's success. There were also lawsuits by former colleagues, including songwriters and performers.

Though these charges accumulated, Gordy refused to comment—he was too busy building Motown to be distracted. He did not break his silence until he published To Be Loved: The Music, the Magic, the Memories of Motown, an entertaining memoir that made best-seller lists around the country. Because Gordy was now talking openly, we sent Contributing Editor David Sheff to speak with the 65-year-old at his Bel Air mansion. Here's Sheff's report:

"This was the first interview I have conducted with an audience. A cameraman filmed the entire event ('Mr. Gordy records everything for the archives,' I was told) while one, and occasionally two, secretaries sat in and took shorthand notes.

"Gordy entered the first session at about 10 in the morning wearing beige cashmere and soft moccasins. He squinted because of the intense lights set up for the filming and insisted that they be shut off ('it's much too early for that,' he said). When the lights were doused, he stretched, shook out his hands and rotated his head—warm-ups left over from his days as a boxer.

"He spoke casually and confidently, clearly enjoying the opportunity to talk. When he reminisced, he often closed his eyes and sermonized in a preacher-like voice. Occasionally he would ask one of his assistants to find a recording of a song he was talking about—an old blues record or a recording by Smokey Robinson. Gordy became lost in the music, but there were a few times—when he played a recording of the Temps singing a new version of the Contours' hit 'Do You Love Me' for example—when I was the one who had to be reminded that it was time to get back to work."

PLAYBOY: After refusing to address the rumors about you and Motown for so many years, why did you finally decide to tell your story?

GORDY: I wish Martin Luther King had written his own book, or JFK. I would have loved to hear their stories in their own words. Beyond that, though I don't like being public, I felt I had to set the record straight. As Motown was growing. I wanted to refute the misinformation, rumors and gossip, but I chose not to. I had to live by the advice I gave to the artists on the label: Don't be distracted from your goals. I told the artists never to answer rumors, and I had to practice what I preached. But I was torn. I particularly wanted kids to understand that no company as beautiful as Motown could have been built in the devious ways that were rumored.

PLAYBOY: Let's tackle the rumors. Did you make deals with the Mafia?

GORDY: No. That rumor grew from an article that appeared in a small neighborhood news sheet. It said, based on nothing, that Motown was being taken over by the Mafia. When it came out, we laughed at it. But the item was picked up by larger papers. It may have been perpetuated by the fact that Barney Ales, an Italian, was running our powerful sales department.

PLAYBOY: You were sued by artists and former employees who claimed you cheated them.

GORDY: You don't stay in business for 35 years by not paying people, and most of the people who worked for me over the years know what I stood for: fairness, honesty and integrity. Yet the stories, once they started, fed on themselves.

PLAYBOY: Some of the bad feelings seemed to come from the way you controlled your artists' lives.

GORDY: Maybe so. I did try to control almost everything. It was

my ball game—my vision, my dream. Many of those artists became superstars, but when they first came to me they were just kids off the street who needed direction. Even some of the lesser Motown artists are still performing, making records, appearing on television, making money. What people don't know is that we carried many artists for years before they ever got a hit. Some never did. The artists received whatever they were due, and a whole lot more—care, personal attention, grooming, advice, direction.

PLAYBOY: But that's the point of the criticism: You were paternalistic. You were able to exploit these artists because they relied on you for everything.

GORDY: To exploit is not necessarily bad. To make use of someone's talent in a positive way benefits everyone. It was that "exploitation" that made many of them little stars, big stars and superstars. I wouldn't let anything go out that I didn't think was right. I knew that every Motown artist represented Motown and was a reflection of Motown. Also, I worked with other aspects of their lives, because raw talent wasn't enough. It had to be nurtured and developed. We had a charm school, chaperones. We made sure the artists paid their taxes.

PLAYBOY: Was that in exchange for one-sided contracts?

GORDY: That's a bunch of bull. We used contracts that were standard in the business, but here's what happens: Usually, when you sign an artist who's a nobody, whatever contract you give them is more than great. Six months later when they have a hit, the contract isn't good enough, at least according to the lawyers and managers who want to take over their careers. Everyone has heard that Elvis Presley paid 50 percent of everything to Colonel Parker. That was a lot, but it may have been worth it to Elvis. Elvis became a multimillionaire because of Parker, so maybe he made a reasonable deal.

PLAYBOY: But, by that example, Parker may have exploited a naive kid desperate to make a record.

GORDY: Maybe so, but wouldn't you have signed that contract if you had been Elvis and had a chance to become a star?

PLAYBOY: Does that make it fair?

GORDY: I'm not saying it makes it fair. But if I had been Elvis, I would have signed. I heard that Joe Dewey and Mike Intel refused to sign with Colonel Parker.

PLAYBOY: We've never heard of them.

GORDY: That's the point.

PLAYBOY: Do you acknowledge that the Colonel, and certainly Motown, was in a position to take advantage of young, inexperienced performers?

GORDY: Absolutely, but so was every other company. Listen, the real contract between the artists and our company was that we would invest our money, creative forces and marketing skills on the gamble that the artist had a talent that would prove to be commercial when fully developed and properly exploited. If we were wrong, we would eat the investment and the artist owed us nothing. If we were right, we would recover our investment and make a profit. The artist would get paid the royalty contracted for, become a professional performer and, we hoped, a star. If that happened they would certainly get a higher royalty rate when their present contract ran out, or, if they were hot enough, we would resign them before it ran out. That's the way I did business, and yes, it was fair. But the funny thing is that money has never been the big motivation for me. Throughout my years in this business, I have seen that money may not be the root of all evil, but it's certainly the root of lots of it.

PLAYBOY: This from the man who wrote, "The best things in life are free, but you can give them to the birds and the bees. I need money, that's what I want."

GORDY: [*Laughs*] Yeah, but I learned ages ago that money cannot make you happy. And I also realized that unless you have money, you can't make that statement. Yes, everybody wants money, and I view that as part of the game. The winners of the game make more money and they live better. But in the end, the things that sustain you, that make you proud, you can't buy with money.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever felt guilty about all the money you've made?

GORDY: Never. Smokey Robinson had been with me five or six years when he came to see me and said, "I think I'm going to die." I asked him what was wrong. He said, "I'm so scared because I'm so happy. I just know something's going to happen." I said, "You're talented, you have worked hard and you've earned it. You deserve what you have and you shouldn't feel guilty about it." I learned this from my father. He had to go on welfare for a while—and he hated it—but he never felt guilty about taking money from the government because he had always worked and supported the government when he was able to. It's the same with success: Nobody gives it to you. You have to earn it.

"I learned ages ago that money cannot make you happy. And I realized that unless you have money, you can't make that statement."

PLAYBOY: You write a great deal about your father in your book. Was he your biggest influence?

GORDY: I have admired a lot of people: Joe Louis, Thurgood Marshall, Jackie Robinson, Sugar Ray Robinson, Nat King Cole. But my father was my hero. It was the way he did things. He was the person I really wanted to prove something to.

PLAYBOY: What were your parents like when you were growing up?

GORDY: They were hard workers. Pop always believed that honest labor was the only way. He worked and sacrificed for us all his life. He was funny, too. A great storyteller. But he was tough. He would beat your ass when necessary. I got mine beat a lot. My parents migrated from the South to Detroit in 1922. Mother had been a teacher in the South but couldn't teach in the North with the credentials she had. She went into her own business, which was called Friendship Mutual Insurance Company. As a kid I was so embarrassed when my friends would come over to play and my mother would ask them, "Is your mother protected?" "From what?" they'd ask. "If something should happen to your father," she said. She was so sincere about people being protected she would sell insurance to anybody. My father, who had been on welfare during the Depression, rented a lot and sold just about everything—car parts, Christmas trees and watermelons. We all grew up working with him. He was a plasterer, too, and he and Mother opened a grocery store.

PLAYBOY: Were you a good kid?

GORDY: I was a little bit of a renegade, sort of the black sheep—but a black sheep in a loving way. I got in trouble quite a lot, but everything my parents did was done out of love for me. I stole something once and was beaten; I never stole again.

PLAYBOY: What was your Detroit neighborhood like?

GORDY: At first we lived on the west side of town. My father thought that was the best place to raise his kids. When we lived

there, I always heard about Hastings Street, on the east side, where it was so violent you could be killed. Then we moved one block from Hastings. I was terrified, but I got there and loved it. Hastings Street was where the bars were, the pawnshops and clubs, blues coming out of the bars, women hanging around outside the bars with nothing to do.

PLAYBOY: Did you become acquainted with those women?

GORDY: Finally, yes. At first I didn't know what they did for a living, but when I found out it was like, Wow! My first time with one of them was when I was 14. I was so excited that I thought that I would explode. I walked this two-block area where they were all standing. I had money in my hand, trying to be cool, but none of them said anything. I thought, Am I too young or just too ugly? Finally, one woman who I had thought was cute said, "Hey, you want to do some business?" I was so shocked I said, "Uh, like what?" She said, "Like fuck, that's what."

I followed her through back alleys to this little room. I had already gotten my pants partway off when she said, "You gotta pay me first." The room was dark and my pants were stuck on my foot and I was struggling to find my money. Finally, I paid her. I remember it was like riding wild horses on a magic carpet. It was phenomenal, all two minutes of it.

PLAYBOY: About that time you took up boxing. How good were you?

GORDY: Good. Very good.

PLAYBOY: So you could have gone on?

GORDY: Yes. I used to think of myself as Killer Gordy. I was a disciple of Sugar Ray Robinson. I had a lot of heart and a lot of determination.

PLAYBOY: So what happened to make you turn to songwriting?

GORDY: One day I was training at the gym and sat down to rest. I looked up at two posters on the wall. One was for a battle of the bands between Stan Kenton and Duke Ellington. The other was for a match between two young fighters. I noticed that the fighters were about 23 and looked 50. And the bandleaders were 50 and looked 23. I had my answer. That's when I jumped into songwriting.

"Throughout my years in this business, I have seen that money may not be the root of all evil, but it's certainly the root of lots of it."

PLAYBOY: How do you write a song?

GORDY: It's done in a hundred ways. Sometimes the words first. Sometimes the music first. Sometimes all together. Anything any way. Once I decided I was going to devote all my time to writing, I became a writing fool. Anything I saw could end up in a song—a license plate number, a paper clip, the way somebody sits. Wherever the idea would come from, I would try to figure out something different about it, give it a twist—or something to make it unique. Try to find a different way to say "I love you" or "you're special" or "I'm sad."

PLAYBOY: How did you go about trying to sell the songs?

GORDY: The first song I tried to have recorded was "You Are You." I wrote it with Doris Day in mind. She was the American girl next door. I knew that she would record it if she heard it, so I sent it to her in Hollywood but never heard back from her.

PLAYBOY: How were you making a living in those days?

GORDY: I came back from the Army and opened a jazz record shop and tried to educate people about jazz. But my customers in Detroit were automobile-factory workers who wanted the blues. They wanted music that made them feel good. Blues made them feel good—or it made them feel good to feel bad. So I went out of business.

PLAYBOY: What did you do then?

GORDY: I went into selling cookware. I heard that you could make a lot of money selling pots and pans door-to-door.

PLAYBOY: Were you a good salesman?

GORDY: Yes. People would invite their friends over and I would cook for them—as many as 20 people at a time—and sell these pans. I did very well until my father went out with me one day. After I made a sale, I was so proud, trying to impress him, but he was upset. He said I was taking advantage of poor people who couldn't afford it. Somehow what he said made sense and I never sold another pot after that. So I tried songwriting again, but I got married and we had a baby and then another and another. My mother-in-law got me a job at a Ford foundry. I worked there for one day and hated it. Then she got me a job at an auto plant. After the foundry, the Lincoln-Mercury plant was fantastic. The place was clean and I liked the assembly line.

PLAYBOY: What was your job?

GORDY: Cars came down the line and I would jump inside and put on the trim—the chrome around the windows. I hooked it in place and screwed it in and the car would move on to the next person, who would jump into it. I was so good at it that I could go down the line and get ahead of myself by four or five cars. Then I'd come back and have time to wait for the next cars to come down. I spent the time singing and writing songs. I'd write them down on scraps of paper.

PLAYBOY: What made you quit the plant?

GORDY: I was saving money, working 12 hours a day sometimes and Saturdays and Sundays, lots of overtime. Still, I never thought about leaving until one lunchtime when I heard some guys talking about how many more years they had until they could really start to live, meaning how many years they had until they would retire. One said he had five, another had seven. I realized I had, like, 33. I thought, This is crazy. I'm not going to wait till I'm 65 to live. I had saved enough money and all I would get was more money. It was time for me to do something that I really loved. So I quit.

PLAYBOY: How did this go over at home?

GORDY: With my wife and in-laws—not good. Even though I had saved money and bought a home, I was back to being a bum again. Then one day I learned that my wife was divorcing me. That's when I wrote the song "To Be Loved."

PLAYBOY: Of all Motown songs, why did you choose "To Be Loved" as the title of your autobiography?

GORDY: It's what I've always wanted and what I feel people want most in life. I wrote that song at one of the lowest points of my life. I was very depressed about the divorce, because I was real close to my three kids. I wanted to lead them the right way, the way I had been led by my parents. It was important to me to have great communication with them, and I thought I had lost that. I went to my sister Gwen's house and told her I was getting divorced and she took it lightly. I said, "But my kids…" She said, "The kids will always love you, the same as we do." When she said that, I started crying. That night, I sat down at her little electric piano and wrote the song. I was sad and depressed about what had happened, but I felt loved. I started playing some chords, and the words came easily: "Someone to care, someone to share, lonely hours and moments of despair, to be loved, to be loved. Oh, what a feeling to be loved." That kind of

emotion is something that we feel very few times in our lives.

PLAYBOY: When did you finally sell a song?

GORDY: My sister introduced me to Al Green, a club owner who managed some acts, including Jackie Wilson. He also owned a music publishing company and was looking for writers. I started working with him. I met a man named Roquel Billy Davis and agreed to write with him. The first song of ours to be recorded was "Reet Petite." I did a little bit of writing on it, not much, just some of the verses—I was good on verses. Jackie Wilson recorded it and it was a big hit.

PLAYBOY: How did the success of the record affect you?

GORDY: I was thrilled. I thought my troubles were over forever and I'd be rich and have all the girls I wanted. The cycle of success that happens to everybody who gets famous began for me.

PLAYBOY: Explain that cycle.

GORDY: When anyone becomes a star, they go through changes brought on by fame and fortune. Few people can survive it. People treat you differently.

PLAYBOY: Do women?

GORDY: Everybody does. I saw it all over the place. The first time I saw Jackie perform was at the Armory in Flint, Michigan. It was always a real treat. When he hit the stage it was unbelievable—women were throwing panties on the stage. Once, I was at one of Jackie's shows and the most beautiful girl I had ever seen was sitting there. We started talking and I wanted to get to know her better. She was the epitome of class and sweetness. She sort of ignored me at first, but when we began talking, I asked if I could call her sometime. It wasn't proper, she said. She said we might meet sometime in the future at one of these shows. I thought, Oh man, that means I'm going to have to come to every show to see her again. After a while we got friendly and we were laughing and stuff like that, and I thought maybe I'd try to kiss her—just on the cheek, a little kiss. "No no no no! I'm not that kind of girl!" We didn't know each other well enough and all that. I was thinking. This girl is too good to be true! She has such virtue, she is so good—who knows? This was future wife material.

We finally agreed to meet at the same spot after the show, but when I came back she wasn't there. So I went backstage, where Jackie was with a tremendous number of girls hanging around him, as always. There was Jackie, half clothed, locked into it with some girl, which he always was. Her dress was up, practically over her head. I got closer and realized it was my girl—with her tongue halfway down Jackie's throat.

PLAYBOY: So much for your future wife.

GORDY: Yes, unfortunately. But this taught me a little something about human nature—about the power of a star. Jackie was a magnet.

PLAYBOY: Were all your acts affected by the adulation they received?

GORDY: How could you not be? It affects people in many different ways, and some can make it through the vicious circle. Others get caught in drugs, some go mad with power, some forget who their friends are, some forget who they are.

"Stardom affects people in many different ways, and some can make it through the vicious circle. Others get caught in drugs, some go mad with power, some forget who their friends are, some forget who they are. "

PLAYBOY: Do most entertainers learn their lessons the hard way?

GORDY: Many of them do. It is so easy to forget who you are.

PLAYBOY: How bad did it get for you in your cycle of success?

GORDY: I'm a quick learner. A while after my first big hit on United Artists, I put out a second record that didn't do too well. I went to New York and took some friends to United Artists. I wanted to show off. I got there and expected to be treated like the king of all kings, but this time they didn't seem to know who I was. I said, "I'm Berry Gordy," but no one had any time for me. I realized how true it was that you're only as hot as your last hit. That was a big lesson for me. I thought, Fuck all this trying to be more important than I am. Let me get my ass back to Detroit and focus on what I should be focusing on. Also, it helped that I was working with all these other people, trying to keep them in line. I never had time to get too far out of line myself.

PLAYBOY: Why did you decide to start your own record company?

GORDY: I wanted to produce my songs the way I wanted them produced. First I set up Jobete Music to handle the publishing of my songs. Smokey was my first writer.

PLAYBOY: How did you meet him?

GORDY: When I was writing for Jackie, Smokey came in with his group to Jackie's manager's office to audition, but they were rejected. I felt real compassion for them and chased them into the hallway and told them that I thought they were really good. We got to talking and Smokey told me he had a hundred songs. When I told him who I was, he was excited; he had seen my name on Jackie's records. I listened to his songs and rejected every one of them. He was so incredible because he never got disappointed, disgusted or bitter. I told him he was a great poet but not such a great songwriter.

But he worked hard and learned and after many false starts came back with a song I liked, "Got a Job." I produced it later. I was with him one day, waiting for a producer's royalty check, thrilled that some money was coming in. I opened the envelope and in it was a check for R56.00. After everyone had taken their cuts, that's all that was left. Smokey said, "You might as well start your own record label. You couldn't do any worse than this." I borrowed R13,900.00 from my family and recorded a song I wrote called "Come to Me," sung by Marv Johnson, a new kid I'd met. I first put it out on my own label, which I called Tamla, after the number one song at that time, "Tammy" by Debbie Reynolds. But when I couldn't afford to distribute it nationally, I sold it to United Artists. "Way Over There" by the Miracles was the first record I went national with.

PLAYBOY: By then you were managing, producing, promoting and writing the songs. Were you going in too many directions?

GORDY: No question about it. But everything I did was to protect my love, the love of songwriting. I wrote the songs and wanted to protect them and get my money, so I became the publisher. Then I became the manager of the artists who sang them and I worked with them so they would sing it right.

PLAYBOY: And Motown came next?

GORDY: That was the beginning of Motown, but I hadn't started calling it that yet. One day Smokey came in with this great new

song, “Bad Girl.” It was truly brilliant and the recording we made was so great that I wanted to launch another label. Tamla was a gimmicky name. I wanted the name of the corporation to be something that meant more to me, and since I had always known Detroit as the Motor City, I came up with the name Motown.

PLAYBOY: You were remarried by then?

GORDY: Not quite. I remarried a year or so later.

PLAYBOY: What happened with that marriage?

GORDY: My marriage to Raynoma ended because I was going with someone else and she was going with someone else. I confessed mine, and she confessed hers. I believe she did it only after I was doing it, but I will never know that.

PLAYBOY: Her book is extremely critical of you. She writes that you cheated her out of ownership of the company.

GORDY: Yeah, I know. When I read her book I was furious. I couldn’t believe it. Ray was a good wife. She did a lot for me and Motown at a key point in the company’s history, and I will always care about her.

PLAYBOY: She apparently didn’t feel the same way. She felt you cut her out of Motown’s success.

GORDY: I didn’t, but the other books about Motown did. I guess it was because she left Motown around 1963, before it exploded. We had our problems. But Ray was a fine person and she loved me to death.

PLAYBOY: She certainly had an odd way of showing it.

GORDY: Obviously, she was hurt. We talked about it. I was furious and called her and said, “Why in the hell would you write some shit like that? I can’t believe you did that!” She said, “I never got credit,” or whatever. “You never did enough for me.” I said, “Yes, but here’s what I did do.” I listed some things—how I helped set her up in business, gave her more money than we agreed on and gave her jobs over and over again. She said, “Yes, but I don’t have any money now,” and I said, “Whose fault is that?” She then agreed with me and said she was sorry for what she had done.

"Smokey said, ‘You might as well start your own record label. You couldn’t do any worse than this.’"

PLAYBOY: Back at the company, what kind of manager were you?

GORDY: I made a point of never making people do things. Instead I made them want to do things. Because no one could ever make me do anything. If they made me want to do it, that was a different story.

PLAYBOY: Yet you have a reputation for toughness.

GORDY: I was tough. When there was a hard decision to make, I made it. Sometimes it’s impossible not to hurt somebody. If there’s something that you really don’t think can work, you have to tell the person.

PLAYBOY: You’ve said that you modeled Motown after the assembly line at Ford. How did it work?

GORDY: At the plant, they started out with a frame and ended up with a brand new car. I wanted the same thing at Motown, only with artists, songs and records. The idea was that someone could walk in unknown off the street and walk out a star. We had writers, producers, arrangers, choreographers, chaperones, managers, a charm school.

PLAYBOY: What was your first million-selling record?

GORDY: “Shop Around” by the Miracles.

PLAYBOY: When did you meet Marvin Gaye?

GORDY: I met him at a Christmas party in my studio. My sister Gwen pointed him out. She said he was with Harvey and the Moonglows but that he wanted to go solo. I heard him sing and loved it. He sang “Mister Sandman.” I heard his voice and felt his soul and knew I had to have this guy on my label.

PLAYBOY: You once said that his music was a place for him to pour out his pain. Was he open about his struggles?

GORDY: Absolutely. If you wanted to know what was happening in Marvin’s life, all you had to do was listen to his music. There was one thing about Marvin: He could not keep a secret. And he was determined to do his own thing. Sometimes I would say, “Marvin, this doesn’t make sense,” and he would say, “I know, but that’s me.”

He and my sister Anna got married and divorced and he wrote about it. He went through some bad times with drugs and he wrote about that. I think his life was on a collision course. We were always good friends. We became even better friends when he left Motown.

PLAYBOY: Was that sometimes the case?

GORDY: Not always, but in his case it was. One day he called me and said he had this new record he was doing for CBS and asked me what I thought about the title. The title, he said, was “Sanctified Pussy.” I was so relieved that I didn’t have to deal with him on that one. I said, “I think you might have a little trouble with the name,” but he said, “No man, that’s what I feel.” I said, “If you feel it, then go for it.” I was so glad it wasn’t my company. [*Laughs*] The song eventually came out as “Sanctified Lady.”

PLAYBOY: Obviously, it was a terrible shock when Gaye was killed by his father. Did he ever discuss the problems between them?

GORDY: He didn’t talk about his father much with me. His death was the end of a troubled life. But he was an incredible genius—the truest artist I have ever known.

PLAYBOY: Do you remember the first time you met the Supremes?

GORDY: It was before they were the Supremes—they were the Primettes, the sister group to the Primes, who became the Temptations. They had come into Motown and were singing in the lobby when I walked by. Their singer, Diana Ross, had this whiny voice. They put so much into the song and were so young and cute that I asked them to sing it again. They did, putting everything into it. I asked them if they were in school and they said they were seniors. I told them I wouldn’t sign them until they finished school; I didn’t want to be responsible for anybody dropping out of school. They were disappointed, but they came back to the studio every day until they finished high school.

PLAYBOY: Did they hit right away?

GORDY: It took three years. Smokey and I both wrote songs for them that were not hits. But when songwriters and producers Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland locked in on them, the hits came, and there were lots of them. I knew then that the Supremes could be something special, and they could help themselves and help Motown. They broke down doors for lots of our acts.

PLAYBOY: So why did you fire Florence Ballard?

GORDY: Flo had a great attitude—a sarcastic, funny attitude. When she was in a good mood, everyone was in a good mood. When she wasn’t, no one was. I didn’t know that she had a drinking problem for a long time—Mary and Diana hid it from me. When I heard about it I was furious, because by that time it was out of control. She was showing up drunk or at times not showing up at all. Ultimately, I had to make one of those hard decisions. I replaced her with Cindy Birdsong.

PLAYBOY: Was Mary Wilson correct when she complained in her

book that you favored Diana Ross from the beginning and that the other singers were pushed aside?

GORDY: If she said I favored Diana she was right, but I don't think anyone was pushed aside. There was never any question in my mind as to who the lead singer was.

PLAYBOY: What do you remember about Stevie Wonder when he first came in?

GORDY: I wasn't that thrilled with his voice, but I was thrilled with his harmonica playing. He also played the bongos and drums. His feeling and attitude were wonderful.

PLAYBOY: Didn't you name him Stevie Wonder?

GORDY: That's what my sister Esther tells me. I don't remember. She says that I said, "What a wonder," and the name stuck.

PLAYBOY: Another early act was Martha and the Vandellas. Martha Reeves also wrote a book that attacked you. She said your focus on the Supremes hurt the other groups. And she sued you for back royalties.

GORDY: I did focus on the Supremes. But not at the expense of the other artists—rather, to their benefit. The Supremes opened at the Copacabana in New York—the first R&B act to play there—and sold out every night for two weeks, and during the off-season at that. Then we were able to book the Temptations, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles and Martha and the Vandellas not only there but also at all the other posh nightclubs in the country, including Las Vegas. It's true that Martha sued me many years after leaving the company. When my attorney told me the Martha Reeves trial was starting the next day in Detroit, I hit the ceiling. Martha and me fighting in court? Ridiculous. I had my secretary get Martha on the phone and I asked her why in the world she hadn't called me personally if there was a problem. She said her people told her it was the best way to go. I asked her what the complaint was, and she said she really didn't know but had been told there was a dispute and she probably had something coming. I asked her why they didn't do an audit of our books to find out. She didn't know. Once she and I talked about it, she understood she had been misled and I made a settlement with her. I did it because it was Martha Reeves, and only because it was Martha Reeves.

"I made a point of never making people do things. Instead I made them want to do things."

PLAYBOY: Let's switch to the Jackson 5. Michael Jackson has said that he resented never having a childhood because he became a star when he was so young. He was 10 when the family signed with Motown.

GORDY: I don't think Michael believes that. He had a childhood when he was with Motown. When I moved them to California we played baseball every week—the Jacksons versus the Gordys. The kids swam and played all the time when they weren't rehearsing.

PLAYBOY: But he also worked extremely hard when he was a child.

GORDY: I don't know what happened at home before he got to Motown, but he had a childhood at Motown.

PLAYBOY: His sister La Toya said that Joe Jackson, their father and manager, abused his children. Is that true?

GORDY: I don't know. I never saw any signs of it. As far as I saw, they were bright and happy children. Joe Jackson has been depicted as a strong and hard person, maybe vicious at times. I have had many differences with him, especially when he took over their careers, but they were an impressive family. They were the easiest group to work with that I have ever known. They stayed focused. They listened to everything I said and they did it happily. I was impressed with whatever got them to that stage before I met them. Whether their mother deserves the credit or their father deserves the credit, somebody does.

PLAYBOY: What happened when Joe Jackson took over as their manager and took them away from Motown to Epic?

GORDY: I was furious. I sued both Epic and the Jacksons because it was a year before their contract was up. Their father, I was told, concocted a story that we stole R35.00 million from the boys. After a long legal battle and audits of our books, they ended up owing us R865,700.00 or something. But it was too late. The kids were long gone from Motown.

PLAYBOY: Jermaine, who had married your daughter Hazel, didn't go to Epic. Was it tough for him?

GORDY: It was. I appreciated it so much—his courage in standing up to his father. One thing Jermaine said their father told them was that Motown was not able to promote their records anymore and we were going down the drain and so forth.

PLAYBOY: Hazel and Jermaine got divorced. Was that a difficult time for you?

GORDY: They were together for 14 years, and even though they're not together now, there is no woman he respects more. And she respects herself, which is even more important. She has a tremendous self-image and wonderful children. Their divorce was tough for me because Jermaine is a fine person. I like him a lot.

PLAYBOY: Of all those who left Motown, Michael Jackson has sold the most records. Was it infuriating to watch him rack up all those million-sellers?

GORDY: Michael was like my son, so I was thrilled for him. When I asked him to do Motown 25, he said he wished I were his father.

PLAYBOY: What do you make of the charges of child molestation that were brought against him?

GORDY: I don't believe them. I know him to be a strong, sensitive human being. He happens to love kids. I know that he's always talked about kids. He's always spent money on kids.

PLAYBOY: If not a child molester, is Michael as weird as many of us think?

GORDY: I doubt it. He is very shy, though—offstage. Once onstage he becomes dominant. He's a fanatic like me, focusing on whatever creative project he's working on. He wants to be the best.

PLAYBOY: But what about all the wild stories—the amusement park at home and the Elephant Man bones, among others?

GORDY: I don't know. They're probably just stories. Michael is a marketing genius. He has studied everybody—me, Walt Disney, Charlie Chaplin, Jackie Wilson, Marcel Marceau, James Brown. He is an incredible sponge, and he is aware of how publicity can help your career no matter what it says—almost. Michael always wanted to be the greatest entertainer in the world and the most popular entertainer in the world. He worked at it. That's why he might have let a lot of those rumors go, or he might have even perpetuated them.

PLAYBOY: What do you make of his marriage to Lisa Marie Presley?

GORDY: I don't know exactly what you mean by "make," but I talked with him a couple of weeks ago, and he said they are very much in love. I hope they are happy. The king of pop and the ex-king of rock's daughter get together—great! I also understand that she's almost as shy as he is. So, I think they need each other.

PLAYBOY: You have said that Motown crossed racial barriers. Did you face racism?

GORDY: I was a kid the first time I heard the word nigger. Six years old. It didn't really come up with Motown until 1962, when the Motortown Revue—a tour of our acts, including the Marvelettes, Mary Wells, the Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas, Marvin Gaye, the Temps, Contours and Smokey Robinson and the Miracles—went through the South. Word came back that the bus had been shot at—real guns, real bullets. That was a horrible feeling for me. I felt guilty and responsible. And real angry. I told them to cancel the tour because I just couldn't have it on my conscience if any of those kids got killed out there. They insisted it was an isolated incident and that they wanted to go on. So I said Okay, but I was fearful and worried.

PLAYBOY: Did you have all-black audiences at that point?

GORDY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: When did Motown begin to cross over into white America and mainstream pop music?

GORDY: We got really big around 1964 and even bigger when people found out how much we were respected in Europe. It helped when the Beatles recorded three of our songs on their second album. A lot of the British groups had been studying the Motown artists and doing Motown songs. Once you're respected elsewhere, you're respected more at home, even in a family.

PLAYBOY: When you did cross over, you were accused of selling out your roots by catering to white audiences. What did you think when you heard that?

GORDY: I thought it was ridiculous. We didn't dwell on black audiences or white audiences. We just focused on putting out great songs. Pop means popular. If it sells a million, it's pop. I didn't give a damn what else it was called.

PLAYBOY: One criticism was that attempting to cross over to a white audience meant that you had to diffuse the music—that it couldn't be "too black." Did you make concessions in crossing over? Did you sell out?

GORDY: [*Laughs*] No, I didn't. Remember, the first song I tried to sell was a song I wrote for Doris Day, a white-sounding song for a white girl. So if that's the case, I sold out my white roots when I changed to black music.

PLAYBOY: Why did you move Motown from Detroit to Los Angeles?

GORDY: I wanted to be in the movies and television. I always wanted to grow.

PLAYBOY: It has been said that the beginning of the end came when you decided to move West.

GORDY: Yeah, I would say it was the beginning of the end. Not the end of Motown—Motown is forever—but it was perhaps the beginning of the end of the fun.

PLAYBOY: What changed?

GORDY: Everything. One of the main things was that when I moved to the West Coast, the writers, musicians, producers and arrangers that I had in Detroit had a lot of other places to go. Everybody wanted them. Naturally, they went where they could make the most money, and the major labels could pay more. Also, trying to get into everything—into movies—meant that I was less able to focus on the artists, records and songwriting.

"Rap music is reflective of the rappers' lifestyles and the frightening way in which they have to live. It's put on record now for everyone to hear."

PLAYBOY: Your first foray into moviemaking was Lady Sings the Blues in 1972. What inspired it?

GORDY: Lady Sings the Blues was the hardest thing I'd ever done until the book. But making it was incredible fun. I had something very real with this movie, accomplishing so many of my childhood dreams.

PLAYBOY: Such as?

GORDY: The dream of making black people look like I thought they should look.

PLAYBOY: How was that?

GORDY: The way they had been portrayed in movies when I was a kid tickled me, but still I was embarrassed. Actors like Stepin Fetchit, the laziest man in the world, Mantan Moreland, who played in the Charlie Chan movies, and all these guys with big bulging eyes who were scared of everything. Well, in Lady Sings the Blues, I was able to make black people look the way I saw them: beautiful, strong and funny like the people I saw hanging around at the clubs when I was growing up. I remembered the beauty of Billie Holiday and I wanted to show that.

PLAYBOY: Was it tough working with Diana Ross in that role?

GORDY: It was probably tougher for her to work with me. When you're working with a possessed, focused fanatic like I am on a subject I was so passionate about, it's not easy. If Diana hadn't been the trouper she is and a perfectionist like me, it could never have worked.

PLAYBOY: How did the movie affect her?

GORDY: It gave her so much more self-confidence. It was a big turning point for all of us.

PLAYBOY: But you weren't minding the store. What was happening at Motown?

GORDY: Everything had dropped and I had to work hard to pull it back up. I worked for a couple of years to bring things back to normal, and then I was off to do another film, Mahogany.

PLAYBOY: That was your directorial debut. Did you enjoy it?

GORDY: It was one of the great thrills of my life. We were in Chicago at night. Big, heavy lights lit up the streets. There were about a hundred crewpeople and extras filling the streets. When I said "Action" to begin the first scene I ever directed, everything and everybody started moving. I loved the scene. When it was over I was busy complimenting the actors—hugging Billy Dee Williams and Diana—and Shelly Berger, my top assistant at the time, tapped me on the shoulder and said, "You'd better say, 'Cut.'" I had forgotten to do that, and everybody and everything was still moving.

The cameraman was still shooting. I said, "Oh, cut." Everything stopped. I'd been chairman of the board but never had the feeling of such power. It was incredible.

PLAYBOY: Diana Ross walked out on the last day of shooting.

GORDY: Well, she was exhausted, and by that time she was really fed up with me. Later I learned that her daughter was sick at home too.

PLAYBOY: You had an affair with Ross. How did you feel when she left Motown? Was that the hardest defection for you?

GORDY: By far. It was such a shock.

PLAYBOY: Did she tell you herself?

GORDY: Not at first. A man came in and said, "I'm representing

Diana Ross." She had been with me for 21 years. She had three seven-year contracts and her latest contract was up. I always thought she'd be with me forever, so I never even thought about re-signing her. When one of her records came out, the sales department would say, "Oh no," because they knew they were going to have trouble with me. I would be on them to make certain it became a hit.

PLAYBOY: Was that your business sense talking or was it your affection for her?

GORDY: I would do it to some extent with any record I believed in. But everybody knew Diana was my baby.

PLAYBOY: Then why did she leave?

GORDY: She got a lot of money, but money wouldn't have mattered if things had been different between us. Throughout her life at Motown, she had heard that she was just a puppet for me. And then she married someone else. We all know what pillow talk can do. Also, I was demanding of Diana because I loved her. Unfortunately, when you love people a lot you don't want them to make mistakes, and you're a little more protective and demanding.

PLAYBOY: Did you push her harder?

GORDY: Much harder.

PLAYBOY: Were you jealous?

GORDY: Maybe more than I admitted at the time. It came up when the Supremes and I were in London and Mary and Flo wanted to go out and party and I told them they couldn't. Mary said, "Don't make us suffer just because you're jealous of Diana going out at night." My point was that they should stay in because they had all these one-nighters to do. They needed their rest. But when Mary hit me with that, I had to think twice. Was I really protecting them or was I jealous?

PLAYBOY: What was your answer?

GORDY: I don't know. I think a little of both. I told Diana what Mary had said and she got a kick out of it, thinking I was a little jealous. Also, when she said she had to get her sleep and wasn't about to go out—the relief I felt indicated that jealousy was there somewhere.

PLAYBOY: You and Ross have a daughter, Rhonda. Why did you keep it from her that you are her father?

GORDY: It was her mother's decision. She felt that the child should not know anything until she was able to handle it and understand it. She made a wise decision, because when she did tell her, Rhonda was able to handle it well.

PLAYBOY: When Ross read your book, she said, "I also wish he had told me he loved me, as he says in the book. Maybe things would have been different—maybe not." How did you feel about that?

GORDY: Great. She was so special to me and I always felt misunderstood by her. In fact, while writing the book, I heard she hated that I was going to write about the first time we slept together. Diana always hated any of her business being in the street. But when she read it and found out that I told the truth about my being so embarrassed, she got a big kick out of it.

PLAYBOY: You admitted you couldn't get it up the first time you slept together. Did you have to think twice before including that story?

GORDY: At least twice. Many people said, "Boy, were you candid. Probably a little too candid." But once I decided to write the book I had to tell the truth, especially about me. I also wrote that I wet the bed when I was a kid. These things happen. I figured, others must wet the bed and must not be able to get it up, so it shouldn't be that big a deal to say it.

PLAYBOY: Ross, the Jackson 5, Michael Jackson, Marvin Gaye and other big acts left Motown. David Geffen told us how difficult it was when artists he had nurtured left his company. Was it the same for you?

GORDY: For many years Motown was untouchable. Nobody would leave. People would try to get them to leave—Mary Wells was the first star who did, in 1964.

PLAYBOY: What happened?

GORDY: Mary had been with me for only four years and was very hot at the time—in fact, she had the number one record in the country, "My Guy." When Mickey Stevenson, head of A & R, told me he was having trouble getting Mary to come to recording sessions, I called her and arranged a meeting at her house. When I asked her what the problem was, she said, "You better talk with my lawyer." I said okay and left with a smile on my face but a rock in my stomach. I met with her lawyer and showed him our assembly line and what we did for the artists. He was impressed and said he would persuade her to stay with Motown. The next day he was fired.

PLAYBOY: Why did she want to leave all that badly?

GORDY: I don't know for sure, but Twentieth Century Fox Records probably paid her a lot of money. They even paid us a royalty to get her out of her contract. They wanted her that bad and she wanted to leave that bad. She went to five other record companies over the next 20 years and never had a hit.

PLAYBOY: Why did so many artists leave?

GORDY: That's a ridiculous question because it leads to a wrong perception. You should have asked, "How did you keep so many so long?" That was the phenomenon. Of the artists you mentioned, only the Jackson 5 left before their contract ran out and Michael had no choice—he was a minor with a father determined to take his children from Motown. Diana stayed 21 years, Marvin stayed 18 years and many of the name artists, including the Marvelettes and Martha and the Vandellas, didn't leave us, we just didn't re-sign them after we moved to Los Angeles. For some of the others it was just human nature. Sometimes the grass looks greener. The truth, however, is that never in the history of the record business have so many stars been on one label at one time for so long.

PLAYBOY: A few artists never left—Smokey, Stevie Wonder, Lionel Richie. What caused them to stay?

GORDY: Certain people were so loyal that money wasn't the issue. Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson and Lionel Richie you could not buy for money.

PLAYBOY: You said that the industry was changing at the time you moved to Los Angeles. How?

GORDY: All the small companies were being swallowed up by big ones. Soon 90 percent of the records were distributed by six companies.

PLAYBOY: What was the impact of that?

GORDY: Control of the music. It's harder for independents to get their records out there if you control distributors, record stores and radio and TV stations. It's much harder for a small company to break in—the cost had gone up so much.

PLAYBOY: How much would it cost to market a record?

GORDY: It would cost R1,731,400.00 just to promote one single. That's how expensive it had become. It cost even more when we had to start making videos because MTV had become so strong. So we were losing money. I started thinking about the Motown legacy. I never thought I would sell the business, but I began to realize it was the only way to ensure that Motown would survive.

PLAYBOY: Yet you stopped an initial deal from going through.

GORDY: I wasn't ready to let go, and I had gotten angry about the restraints they were putting on me. I couldn't use the Gordy name for five years, things like that. I just felt like fighting back so I said to hell with it. But after a year and a half I had to let it go.

PLAYBOY: How bad did it get?

GORDY: Real bad. I remembered a few years before, when I first realized how bad it was. My accountants told me I was in trouble, and I said, "What does that mean?" They said, "You're bankrupt." I got crazy. "Why wasn't I told?" They said, "You were told." They

had sent memos saying the sales department was costing too much, the promotion department was costing too much, the marketing department was costing too much and I was giving too much to the artists. See, I was an entrepreneur, and entrepreneurs are great at building things but not so great at controlling the growth as it explodes.

So I had to sell it, but this time without the restrictions and for a lot more money. It was a big poker game. It was the biggest poker hand of my life. If I had lost I would have lost everything. Finally, MCA beat the other offers and I got R1,100.00 million.

PLAYBOY: Jesse Jackson accused you of selling out one of America's strongest black companies.

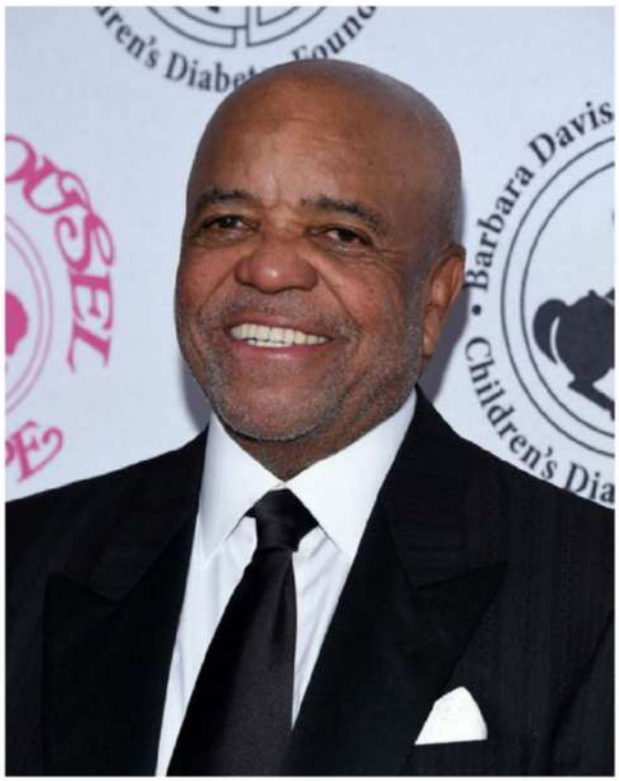
GORDY: Jesse, who had been a longtime friend, came to discuss it. I told him, "I have three choices: Sell out, bail out or fall out. Which do you suggest?" He sort of laughed and said, "Okay, Brother Berry, do whatever you have to do."

PLAYBOY: Did you consider going with the company—staying on to run it?

GORDY: You're kidding.

PLAYBOY: Geffen continued to run Geffen Records after he sold it.

GORDY: First of all, David is a much better businessman than I am, one of the smartest cats I know. He's such a powerful player it's hard to know who's working for whom. The idea of working for somebody never even crossed my mind.



PLAYBOY: What else could you imagine doing with your time?

GORDY: First of all, I'm enjoying my freedom so much it's incredible. Just knowing that I will be blamed only for what I do and not for what the artist or anybody at Motown does is wonderful. The book took five years of my life. Now I have many options. I went up to Vegas the other night to see Smokey play at Caesars Palace. I sat in the audience with his producer, Michael Stokes, and—I hadn't done this for years—I turned to Michael and said, "Give me a piece of paper, quick!" Here I am watching the show and writing notes for Smokey, a guy who is a consummate professional. But I noticed little things.

PLAYBOY: For example?

GORDY: His voice is as great as ever, but I thought the overture could have been more dramatic. I had some ideas for new arrangements. He opened with a really nice ballad, but I wanted him to start out with something more up-tempo. So I ran backstage and worked my way through the crowd and Smokey hugged me and said, "How did you like the show?" I said, "It was great, it was wonderful, but, I've got to talk to you. Look, I have a few notes…" He busted out laughing. Anyway, I realized how much I love that part of the business. Who knows? Maybe I would manage someone again. I'm spending quite a bit of time restructuring Jobete, our publishing company, to compete in the 21st century. Jobete owns most of the copyrights to the Motown songs, and those songs are all over the place right now—movies, television and so forth. Yet only five percent of the songs are being used, bringing in 95 percent of the income. There's a gold mine there.

PLAYBOY: You've also been spending time in South Central, working with kids. What can you tell them that's different from what they're hearing all the time?

GORDY: First of all, these kids came up in the same environment as I did, and some are ex-gang members. I relate to the kids down there, and I want them to know that there's nothing they can't do if they deal with it in a positive way. If they're smart enough to keep these drug deals in their heads, keep track of the money, keep ahead of the cops—all that—imagine what they could do in a legitimate business with a computer! So they have a chance to die, go to jail or become rich and famous using talents that they already have. I want them to know there's a price tag on everything—to know about the theory of no free lunches. They may be able to make R34,700.00 a week dealing drugs, but the price is much heavier than most of them realize. I tell them, "You have to worry about your mother, your father, your little brothers, who could be killed. You have to constantly look over your shoulder." Suddenly a job for R4,350.00 a week in which they learn computer skills sounds better.

PLAYBOY: What is your take on rap music—songs about niggers, whores and bitches?

GORDY: Number one, not all rap music is about "niggers, whores and bitches." I have a problem with any song that advocates violence or racism or disrespect to women. Much of rap is about the conditions under which rappers live. It's a language they have developed to describe what they go through. They're putting it on record for everyone to hear. I think some of it reflects their lifestyles and the frightening way that they have to live. A lot of people don't know what's going on in communities they don't see, so maybe it's good to awaken our consciousness to some of it.

At Motown, we always avoided records that I thought were bad for society. We decided on a case-by-case basis. I didn't want to put out Norman Whitfield's "Cloud Nine" because I thought it advocated drug use. We discussed it back and forth. He was determined, so I let him do it. But before I did, we voted on it at a company meeting. I voted against it, but the rest were for it. The song was a big hit and was our first Grammy.

But I was always concerned. Artistic freedom is important, but if you think something is damaging to society, that's something else. We have a responsibility not to hurt people willfully. And we must remember that creative people are very powerful. People say it's just music, but music is very powerful.

Lima Roe

know your worth

Model **@lima_roe**
Creative Director / Stylist **Aria Garcia | @FashionsinStorage**
Photographer / Hair **Chris Martin | @ByChrisMartin**
Producer **Janeisha John / @janeisha_missvi**
Associate Creative Director **Charles Calzada | @charliedirectsstyles**
Production **Edgar Martin | @edgarmartin_**
Makeup Artist **Candice Renae | @candicerenae_**
Set Design **Alessadro Vose | @ManerkStudios**
Videographer **Xavier Albert | @_xavieralbert**

Happy to have you on Playboy. Any exciting projects lined up this year? Thank you! I'm truly honored to be featured in Playboy's March publication. This year is already off to an exciting start for me. I released my first single of the year, 'Prada Myself,' in January. It's a record that really speaks to growth, resilience, and celebrating your wins. And I'm not stopping there. I have more new music on the way, including a special release created specifically in celebration of this Playboy feature that will be dropping very soon. 2026 is definitely a big year for me creatively.

What does confidence mean to you personally? Confidence, to me, is stepping fully into your truth unapologetically, no matter what anyone has to say. It's keeping your head high, owning your story, and being true to who you are, even when the world tries to define you. Real confidence isn't about perfection, it's about self acceptance. It's knowing your worth, standing in it boldly, and not shrinking yourself to make others comfortable.

What has been the most defining moment in your journey so far? The most defining moment in my journey has been becoming the artist I am today while also owning the number one radio station in the Virgin Islands . All within a male-dominated industry. Building my brand as both a creative and a businesswoman hasn't been easy, but it's been incredibly empowering. To lead, to compete, and to win in spaces where women are often underestimated. That alone has shaped me

What's a lesson you've learned that changed the way you see yourself? One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that other people's opinions are not my identity. For a long time, I allowed outside noise ,criticism, doubt, and people's expectations to shape how I saw myself. But I realized that the only validation that truly matters is my own. That lesson changed everything for me. It taught me to see myself as powerful, capable, and worthy without needing permission. Once I understood that, I moved differently. I stopped shrinking and started owning who I am.

What's one lifestyle change you made this year that completely transformed you? One lifestyle change I made this year was choosing peace over pressure. I stopped feeling the need to constantly make people happy or go out of my way for those who wouldn't do the same for me. That shift alone changed everything. I learned that protecting my energy isn't selfish; it's necessary. Whether that meant creating distance from friends or even family, I chose my peace. And in doing that, I became more grounded, more focused, and more aligned with who I truly am.

What does being featured in a magazine in 2026 represent for you at this stage of your journey? Being featured in a magazine in 2026 represents growth, faith, and resilience for me. When I think about where I started and everything I've had to overcome, this moment feels surreal. To be part of Playboy's March publication is more than a feature; it's a reminder that determination, prayer, and refusing to give up truly pay off. It shows that no matter your beginnings, you can evolve, elevate, and step into spaces you once only dreamed about. Being featured in a magazine like Playboy represents so much growth for me. Growing up on an 84-square-mile island in the Virgin Islands, not having many outlets made it hard to get ahead or to pursue my dreams. But I found ways to push through, create opportunities, and pursue my passions, and being here now fills me with a deep sense of pride for my home, my people, and my roots. It's especially meaningful that this is Playboy Denmark. My awareness of Denmark comes from stories I heard from my elders about the early days when the Virgin Islands were known as the Danish Caribbean islands. Several of my family members traveled there to explore cultural connections, and one of my cousins was even named after a Danish nun who lived on St. Croix years ago. Many of my family members still carry Danish last names today. As I look around my beautiful island, St. Croix, I'm constantly reminded of that connection, and being able to honor it through this feature makes this moment even more special. This isn't just a milestone for me, it's proof that perseverance opens doors you never imagined possible.

If you could write a letter to your younger self, what would you say? If I could write a letter to my younger self , I would say this: You are stronger than you know. The things you're going through right now are not meant to break you; they are shaping you. I know it feels lonely at times. I know you're figuring things out on your own. But every obstacle, every setback, every tear is building resilience inside of you. Don't rush your journey. Don't let pain convince you that you're less than. One day, you'll look back and realize that the very struggles you questioned were the foundation of your strength. Everything happens the way it's supposed to, even when we may not agree. Stay kind. Stay focused. Keep your faith. And never let the world harden your heart...let it refine you instead.

What's a childhood dream you've held on to? One childhood dream I've always held onto is becoming a superstar. Someone who could entertain and inspire people all over the world. Hence why I started performing on stage at the age of eight, competing in countless pageants across the island. Even as a little girl, I knew I wanted to make people feel something, whether through music, my voice, or simply my presence. That dream never left me. It just evolved. Today, it's not only about fame , but it's about impact. It's about using my platform, my music, and my influence to connect with people globally and remind them that their dreams are valid too.

Looking back, what advice would you give to your younger self? Looking back, the advice I would give my younger self is simple: trust your journey and honor your own path. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, and don't let anyone else's expectations define your worth. Do what works for you . What works for someone else may not work for you. Go at your own pace and stay true to yourself. Learn to protect your energy, embrace your ambition, and never apologize for chasing your dreams. Most importantly, remember that everything you go through, the struggles, the heartbreaks, the triumphs , is shaping you into the person you're meant to be.

What do people often get wrong about you? There are two things people often get wrong about me. The first is assuming I had life all figured out, or that I was born with a silver

spoon, and that everything I wanted was handed to me. The truth is far from that. I grew up in a single parent household, watched my mother work so hard to raise four kids on her own. I remember missing out on opportunities simply because we couldn't afford them. The second misconception is that people think I'm stuck up. I'm far from that. I'm confident, unapologetically myself, and I know my worth. People often see the surface, but there's so much more to my story than meets the eye.

Do you have any hidden talents? If so, what is it? Besides the fact that I can actually rap, I don't really have any other hidden talents...or so I thought...lol. But I do feel like I can sing , although one of my cousin insists otherwise!..lol..I guess some things are just for me to know and explore.

What's one lesson from your journey that you wish you'd learned earlier? The biggest lesson I wish I'd learned earlier is that nobody has to do anything for you. It's up to you to get yourself where you need to be. Work hard, stay consistent, and don't give up , because nobody owes you anything. Once you understand that, you stop waiting on others and start owning your own journey.

What makes you the ultimate partner to have? What makes me the ultimate partner is that with me, you get the whole package. I'm loyal, fun, and someone you can truly be yourself with. I love trying new things, I'm adventurous, and when I love someone, I go all in. That's also why I'm selective and cautious. I know my worth, and I don't want anyone taking advantage of my heart. When I commit, it's genuine, full hearted, and pure.

When people look back at this moment in your career, what do you hope it represents about who you are? When people look back at this moment in my career, I hope it represents someone who never gave up, someone who doesn't settle, and someone who keeps pushing forward. I want it to show that the sky is the limit. No matter the obstacles, you can rise, evolve, and achieve more than you ever imagined.

What's one goal you didn't hit last year that you're determined to achieve this time? One goal I didn't hit last year was releasing new music. I wanted to put out more than just music, but it didn't happen. This year, I'm determined to accomplish what I didn't last year. I kicked things off by releasing my first single, 'Prada Myself,' in January, and now I'm featured in Playboy's March publication, doing something beyond music. I'm already seeing my goals come to life, and we're only in the first quarter...lol.

What new doors or opportunities are you hoping to explore in your career? As an artist being featured in my first major publication, I'm excited about the doors this could open. I hope to explore collaborations in music, expand my creative projects, and continue gaining opportunities to be featured in some of the biggest magazines. This is just the start of taking my artistry and influence to the next level.

What advice would you give to someone learning to step into their confidence? My advice to anyone learning to step into their confidence is to start by owning your truth. Don't shrink yourself to make others comfortable, and don't wait for validation from anyone else. Protect your energy, know your worth, and move in alignment with your values.

Confidence comes from showing up consistently for yourself, trusting your journey, and not being afraid to stand alone if you have to.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? You can catch up with me and stay updated on my work by following me on social media, my Instagram is @Lima_Roe and my Facebook is Lima Roe. I am also a broadcaster in the Virgin Islands, of the #1 Radio Station, 101.3 ROE FM WEVI. You can keep up with us on Instagram or Facebook at @101.3 ROE FM WEVI. There's a full page ad in this magazine with a barcode, just scan it to listen to the live stream of ROE FM! Get a taste of Paradise Away From Paradise.

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WEED WARRIOR:
Cannabis Knows Best

In the first installment of a series of columns on his deep relationship with cannabis, our writer shares his origin story as a pot prophet—someone who lives in service to the leafy green goodness, from smuggling to smoking to selling

BY **ANDREW DEANGELO** ILLUSTRATIONS **ROB STITES**

For the better part of four decades, my life has revolved around cannabis. I have sold, grown, smuggled, transported and hidden it. I have pushed to make it legal. I have opened a cannabis retail shop. I have become an evangelical priest and political operative for the cannabis plant.

I estimate that I have touched more than a billion dollars' worth of cannabis over my career. Thousands of pounds of weed have passed through my hands. Tens of thousands of people have enjoyed and been healed by the cannabis I've traded. I say this not to inflate my sense of value or ego, but to illustrate just how much smarter cannabis is than I am.

I first encountered cannabis in high school when I was 15 years old, and it's been a daily part of my life ever since. I'm 52 now, and I have served this plant for 37 years, helping it propagate all over the world. I've put my life and freedom at risk to spread cannabis far and wide. My entire value system is built around the lessons I learned while under the influence of the intoxicating allure of cannabis.

Engaging my endocannabinoid system daily with external cannabinoids has made me a softer and wiser person, one who understands that I'm just a small part of the web of life. And I have come to revere the life force that makes the sun burn and our hearts beat—the life force that embodies both the cannabis plant and the sentient being known as myself. We've been together a long time now. You might say we are the best of friends.

I knew it would be this way during that first smoke way back in 1984. A serious sports injury had just crushed my dreams of becoming a professional athlete, and I sat, depressed, in my mom's kitchen. My older brother handed me a joint. "It'll make you feel better," he said. I had resisted similar overtures in the past, but a little voice deep inside told me to hit that joint. And when the joint hit me back, the transformative effects that cannabis has on many people happened to me instantaneously. My sadness lifted, and I began to see that there was more to life than playing sports. Suddenly I had a new ally—this plant that I could turn to for strength, wisdom and inspiration.

This realization was incredibly liberating for me as a young man trying to find his place in the world. I knew I had to keep being with this plant and had to help others do the same. And at the age of 15, that's about all I knew—that and the fact that change is the only constant. I was just learning how to be in the world, but somehow I knew that I had to sell weed. What happened to me needed to happen to everybody. The plant was so wise. If I could just get it into the hands of more people, the rest of the work would be done by Mama Ganja. The world would become a more compassionate place by default.

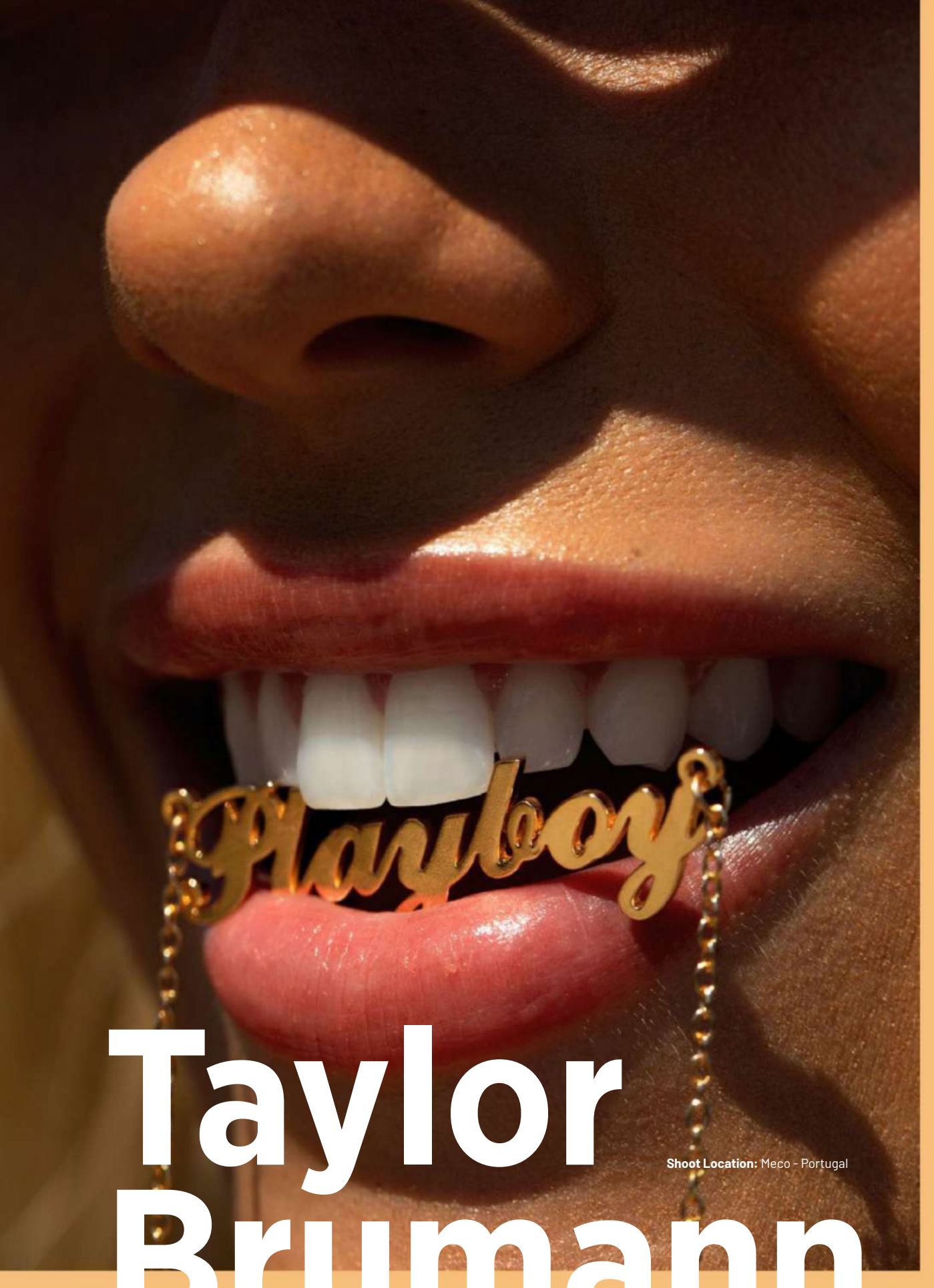
What I didn't know was just how hard it would be to break cannabis prohibition and erase the stigma that goes with it. I had figured it would be easy because even at 15 years old, I saw the absurdity of cannabis prohibition. But I had no way of knowing or understanding the kind of sacrifice needed to do something as monumental as getting the U.S. to legalize weed. I didn't know my quest would cost me relationships I cared about but could not sustain as I worked underground, as well as careers and other aspirations that were closed to me, out of reach due to my cannabis advocacy during a time when the war on drugs was all the rage. I didn't know that I would be busted and locked up, which happened to many family members and friends of mine as well.

Cannabis is in the driver's seat: We are merely passengers on a journey to somewhere better.

Those things caused me a lot of personal pain by subjecting me to rejection and ostracization for no good reason. I was in a constant state of doubt about my life and choices. And through it all, cannabis provided comfort, relief and reassurance that I was on the right path—even if it was very dark, sometimes, with no end in sight. The cannabis community that I helped foster underground, and later above ground, has always been the source of healing and opportunity for me. All these brothers and sisters have been touched by cannabis the same way I've been. Together, we all have a similar understanding that cannabis is in the driver's seat: We are merely passengers on a journey to somewhere better.

Our role is to end cannabis prohibition, free the plant and create a global hemp economy. The plant will take it from there because the plant got us this far. Cannabis will soon be cultivated everywhere on earth. It is a plant that has bloomed inside human physiology and integrated itself in our DNA; a plant that can be food, fiber, fuel and medicine; a plant that has captured the imagination of science, art, music and pop culture. It is a plant that has a wisdom far beyond our own.

I am grateful to be in service of cannabis because cannabis is smarter than I am. Mama Ganja knows where she's going. I just have to help her get there.



Taylor Brumann

Shoot Location: Meco - Portugal

Photography by **Ana Dias**
Producer **Goncalo Jorge**
Makeup and hair **Raquel Batalha**
Photography Assistant **João Ferreira**
Video **Filipe Figueiredo**
Aerial images **Pedro Barradas**

Birth: 19.12.1996
Instagram account: @taylor.brumann
Measures: 86/62/92
Height: 170cm
Weight: 51kg
Country where you live: Switzerland
Country you were born in: Switzerland
Occupation: Model
Favorite movie: Shutter island
Favorite music: techno/house/anything to sing along to
Favorite book: I don't have one but anything with psychology fascinates me

Describe yourself. Tell us a little about yourself and your personality.
I have different personalities haha. I would say I'm a really open minded and cheerful person most of the time. I tend to be a bit hyperactive so I talk a lot and I can't sit still for too long... I'm very communicative with everyone. On the other hand, I am really sarcastic and most people can't always keep up with that. I'm also a very strong person emotionally and very deep. I have a lot of empathy and understanding for almost everything. Self reflects a lot.

How was the shooting for Playboy with Ana Dias?
It was truly amazing! Ana and her team were so kind and funny! They made me feel very comfortable and we laughed a lot. Really good energy on the set. I loved it!

What are your career ambitions?
I want to keep modeling and growing. Also I want to start with acting which I am doing now... slowly getting there ;)

Describe hobbies/interests/special skills.
I love traveling, walking a lot, hanging out with my friends, being in nature, listening to good music and drinking good wine. Special skills..... I do ski and would say I'm good at it but besides that..... I'm good at packing my suitcase? Does that count haha?

What makes you happy?
A lot of things can make me happy. sunshine, good people, good energy, nature, good food, good photoshoots ;)

Who is your celebrity crush? And why?
I was never the type of girl who had a celebrity crush butttt I would say Brad Pitt in a bit younger than now haha. He is very handsome and I like his manly and calm energy.

What do you love most about your body?
hmmmm... my collarbones and arms hahahah or my face I guess...

How do you feel about posing nude?
It always depends. I have no problem with it unless I feel comfortable with my surroundings and the people I work with.

What is at the top of your bucket list?
Keep traveling to new places!

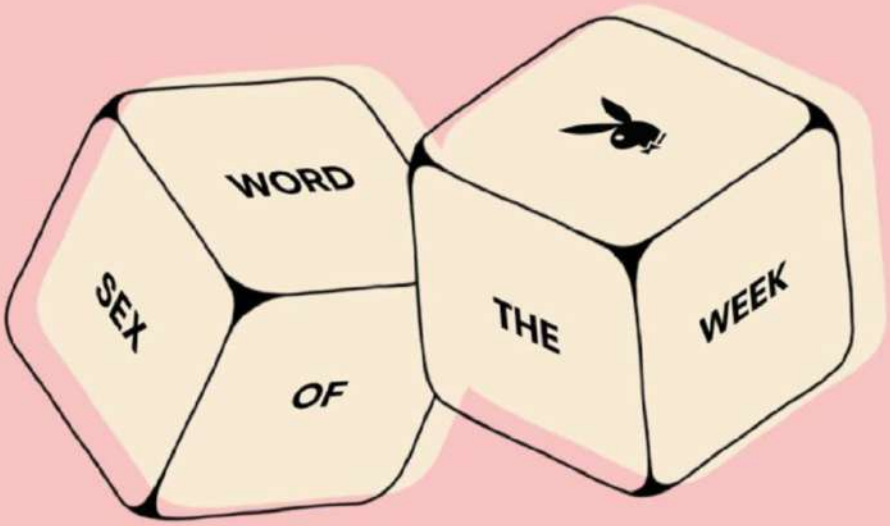
What is the craziest thing you did?
Skydiving a few weeks ago!

What's your guiltiest pleasure?
Chocolate, wine and pasta...

When do you feel sexiest?
When I put on nice lingerie or when I'm super happy and comfortable with life

You're particularly turned on by:
Good vibes, authentic people, funny people, depth between people

You're turned off by:
Drama, rude people, unthankful people



Merkin

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATION BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

merkin (*n*) a pubic wig

Jackson nervously adjusted his merkin as he climbed onto the bed for the romance flick's first love-making scene.

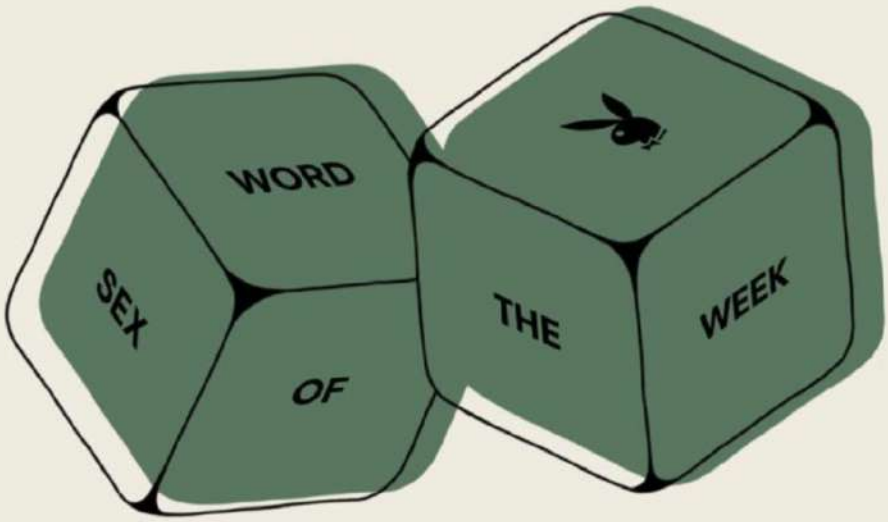
It's the first week of December, and the weather outside is getting frightful. Don't worry: With your warm, toasty merkin, you can let it snow with nothing to fear. A merkin is basically a cute little hair piece that keeps your private parts, well, private. It's a pube wig—a crotch weave, if you will.

It's not entirely clear when the term came about, but it may have been as early as the 1400s. Merkins are believed to have been originally sported by sex workers who wanted to decorate the mons pubis they kept clean-shaven for hygienic reasons.

Now it's mostly used in film or theater to give the illusion of a luxurious bush or to delicately toe the line of full-frontal nudity. A well-crafted merkin is hard to detect, but you can catch glimpses of them in plenty of Hollywood projects: Rooney Mara in The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, Jake Gyllenhaal in Love & Other Drugs and Kate Winslet in The Reader.

The decision to wear a merkin can also simply be a fashion statement, a rebellion against the stringent grooming codes society foisted upon us. Fashion designer Kaimin made merkins one of the most memorable fashion trends of 2018 when she sent them down the runway at New York Fashion Week.

So while we bust out our winter wardrobes, remember you can layer up as much or as little as you want.



Cuckqueen

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATION BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

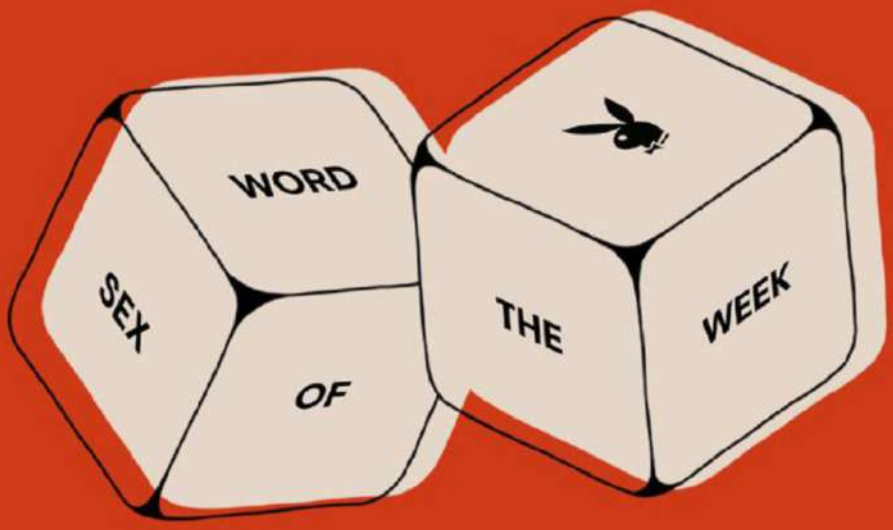
cuckqueen (*variant: cuckquean*) (*n*) a woman who enjoys watching her partner engage in sexual activity with someone else

Jessica, new to being a cuckqueen, felt her heart race as she saw her husband climb on top of the woman they met that night.

Cuckold is a common, ancient term. Usually hurled at a submissive man as an insult, it describes someone who is greatly aroused by watching their partner be unfaithful. Today, we're discussing the cuckold's lesser-known female equivalent, the cuckqueen. Men aren't the only ones who "like to watch." There's a community of women who derive pleasure, or even compersion, for those who have been following this series closely, from seeing their partner orgasm without them.

There's a bit of a masochistic aspect to it, as the cuckqueen often likes feeling victimized or humiliated by the process. There are different levels of cuckqueening: Watching your partner have a bedroom romp with someone else is one form, but it could also be sitting idly by as they flirt with another woman at a bar.

As long as there is effective communication and boundaries have been set for you, your partner and whomever they've decided to bring into the cuckqueen session, there's no yuck in a good cuck.



Santaphilia

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATION BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

santaphilia (*n*) a sexual obsession with Santa Claus

Clara couldn't stop herself from staring at the mall Santa's belly whenever he let out a hearty laugh. Her santaphilia always crept in this time of year.

Anyone who doesn't think Santa is the ultimate top is lying. When you take a closer look, it's painfully obvious what a kinky, jolly bastard he is. He's an older man who tells you to sit on his lap and confess your deepest desires, which he'll gladly bestow but only if you haven't been a bad boy or girl. That is some serious Fifty Shades of Sleigh shit right there.

Santaphilia is a term used to refer to a sexual attraction to good old Saint Nick. And, honestly, it makes a lot of sense. Once you subtract the whole "symbol of love and light to children around the world" thing, you have a sophisticated gentleman who's generous and well-traveled, runs a successful nonprofit organization and looks great in a uniform.

This fetish is more common than one might think. If you felt a tingle down under while watching the iconic Mean Girls scene where Regina George and company practically did a striptease to "Jingle Bell Rock" in their itty-bitty Santa costumes, then you're a closet santaphiliac.

For anyone who might be a ho (ho ho) for Santa, know that it's a normal impulse. After all, Santa is the ultimate provider of pleasure—and he doesn't even ask for anything in return. He just wants you to be a good person. What's more of a turn-on than that?

Believe in the version of you

Victoria Snooks

Photography by Joshua Paull | @jpaullphoto

Model **@victoriasnooks**

How does it feel to see yourself featured in this issue, and what does this moment mean to you personally? Seeing myself featured in this issue feels surreal and deeply validating. It's a reminder of how far I've come, the hard work I've put in, and the growth I've embraced along the way. Personally, this moment means celebrating my own journey, trusting myself, and knowing that staying true to who I am can open doors I never imagined.

How would you describe your lifestyle in three words right now? Focused, learning, and delicate.

What does your ideal day off look like? My ideal day off is soaking up the sun, relaxing, and indulging in a spa day. Slow mornings, warm light, and massages, just a day to recharge and feel completely at peace.

As we step into a new year, what's your biggest resolution for yourself? My biggest resolution this year is to choose myself gently, consistently, and without hesitation. To honor the quiet parts of me that crave stillness, the bold parts that crave growth, and everything in between. I want to follow what feels aligned, release what no longer serves me, and move through life with intention and presence. This year, I hope to create more moments that feel like breathing deeply into sunlight, to nurture my dreams while respecting my limits, and to step into each day as fully and honestly as I can, allowing my light to grow, softly but unmistakably.

What goals are at the top of your list for the year ahead, both personally and professionally? This year, my top goals are about growth and balance, both personally and professionally. Personally, I want to prioritize self-care, nurturing my relationships, and continuing to evolve into the best version of myself I can be. Professionally, I'm focused on building my brand intentionally, taking on projects that inspire me, and stepping confidently into new opportunities that align with my vision. It's all about growth, purpose, and living with intention.

Is there a skill or hobby you've recently picked up or want to learn soon? I've recently set my sights on learning to scuba dive. There's something so exciting about exploring the underwater world; it feels like stepping into a completely different universe. I love the idea of challenging myself, discovering new perspectives, and experiencing a kind of freedom and calmness that only comes from being surrounded by the ocean.

If you had a free weekend with no responsibilities, how would you spend it? If I had a free weekend with no responsibilities, I would spend it at the beach relaxing in the sun, walking along the shore, and enjoying the ocean. Just time to unwind and recharge by the water.

What's a fear you're determined to overcome? I'm determined to get over my fear of snakes... or at least be able to see one without screaming, jumping, or running for the hills. I want to be the kind of person who can stay calm, maybe even admire them from a safe distance, instead of losing it every time one slithers by. Baby steps, but eventually, I'd like to say 'cool, a snake' instead of freaking out.

If you could travel anywhere in the world this year, where would you go and why? I would love to go to the Amalfi Coast. There's something about that place that feels like it exists outside of real life: the buildings stacked along the cliffs, the sparkling water that looks like it's been edited, the slow mornings with espresso and sea breeze. I love the idea of wandering through tiny streets, letting the sun warm my shoulders, eating fresh pasta on a balcony overlooking the ocean, and feeling like time doesn't exist for a mere moment. It feels like the kind of trip that renews you from the inside out.

What's a passion outside of modeling that you hope to pursue more deeply? Outside of modeling, I've been really passionate about wellness and self-care. I hope to explore that more deeply this year. Whether it's learning new ways to take care of my body and mind, diving into mindfulness practices, or helping others discover what makes them feel their best, I want to make this a bigger part of my life. It's all about growth, balance, and creating a lifestyle that feels intentional and nourishing.

What's one major career milestone you're aiming to achieve next? The next major career milestone I'm aiming for is building my brand in a way that feels fully authentic to me, taking on projects and opportunities that excite me, align with my vision, and challenges me to grow. I want to step confidently into bigger roles, reach a wider audience, and create work that truly reflects who I am and what I stand for.

What new experiences or adventures are you hoping to try in the new year? In the new year, I'm hoping to try new experiences that

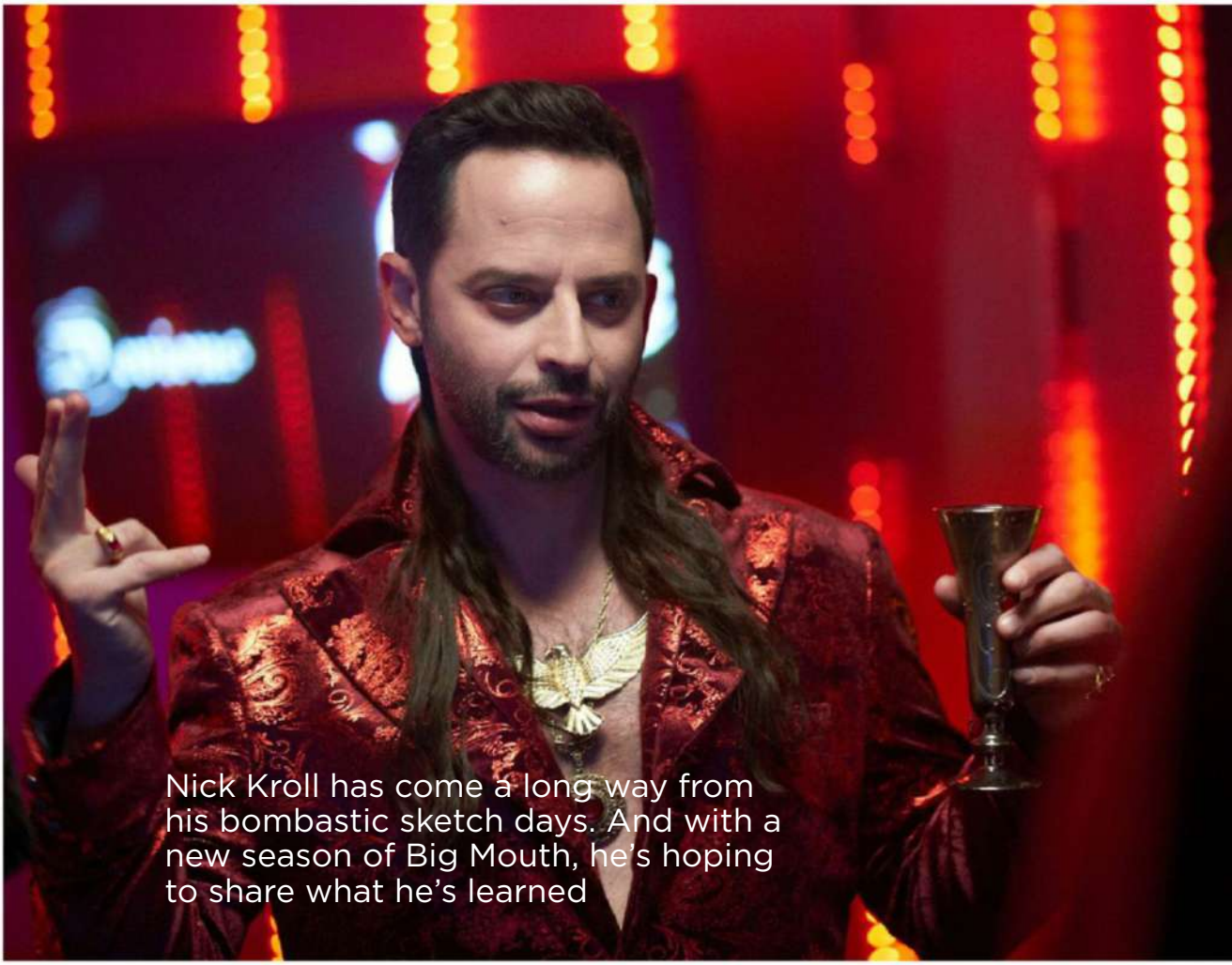
push me out of my comfort zone while also traveling more and exploring the world. From learning to scuba dive and discovering the ocean's beauty, to quick beach trips, exploring new cities, and immersing myself in different cultures. I want a year full of adventure, inspiration, and unforgettable moments.

What advice would you give your younger self starting out in the industry? I'd tell my younger self to protect her energy and trust her own pace. Not every opportunity is worth taking, and not every opinion deserves space in your head. Stay in control of yourself, set clear boundaries, and never apologize for evolving. The people who matter will respect your growth, and the rest were never meant to come with you anyway. And most importantly, believe in the version of you that you're becoming. She's stronger, smarter, and more successful than you ever imagined.

How do you hope people will remember you decades from now? Decades from now, I hope people will remember me as someone who moved through life with softness and depth. Someone who created beauty, stayed true to herself, and made others feel seen, understood, and a little bit lighter just by being around. I hope they remember the warmth I brought into rooms, the kindness I led with, and the way I tried to make life feel a little more magical for myself and everyone close to me.

Thank you so much for your time. Where can our readers / your fans keep up with you? Thank you! You can keep up with me on Instagram @victoriasnooks and TikTok @victoriasnooks for fun little sneak peeks, but for a more personal, behind-the-scenes experience, come join me on OnlyFans @snooks... I promise it's worth it.

Out of Character With Nick Kroll



Nick Kroll has come a long way from his bombastic sketch days. And with a new season of Big Mouth, he's hoping to share what he's learned

BY **JULIE SEABAUGH** PHOTOS BY **SHUTTERSTOCK**

Nick Kroll doesn't like being online.

Although much of his early career was defined by his outsize sketch characters, many of whom have become viral figures, Kroll preferred to let the internet's gaze stop there.

"I don't love giving personal access, so the whole thing used to make my skin crawl," Kroll says over a Zoom call from his home in Los Angeles. "I stayed away from it for the most part because I'd rather have my work speak for what my personal beliefs are. I really struggle on social media because it's not what I intended to do. I intended to do comedy and write and be an actor and produce things. I didn't intend to be a personality who has a take on everything."

That ended in 2020. This interview happened just a few days after November's presidential election was officially called for Joe Biden. The victory provided a cautiously optimistic bookend to a turbulent year that included a global health dilemma, a racial justice reckoning and a leadership crisis. From quarantine, public and private figures alike were forced to rethink how they showed up on social media.

"At a time when so many people felt powerless and someone like me has a platform, it became impossible to stay quiet," Kroll says.

That took different forms. Sometimes it was signal-boosting GoFundMe accounts for the families of victims of police brutality such as Breonna Taylor and Jacob Blake or encouraging donations to organizations such as Black Visions Collective and Equal Justice Initiative. But it was also confronting past failures on his own projects, namely the decision to cast Jenny Slate as a young girl of color on his critically adored Netflix show Big Mouth, the fourth season of which premieres December 4.

"We sincerely regret and apologize for our original decision to cast a white actor to voice a biracial character," Kroll posted on his Instagram and Twitter in June, as Black Lives Matter discussions rose to the foreground of national media. "We made a mistake, took our privilege for granted, and we are working hard to do better moving forward."

When I asked if the issue of Slate voicing a nonwhite character had ever come up prior to this summer, he acknowledges that it had.

"Jenny had vocalized it in the past. It kept coming up in various ways. Then around the George Floyd murder and everything that followed, Jenny said she really didn't feel comfortable, so we went to our black writers and cast members to talk about it," Kroll says of the decision to recast the character. "I can't say they were easy conversations, but none of it was contentious. It all made sense."

"We had to admit our blind spots, and I think we have ultimately landed in a really good place with Ayo [Edebiri], who is such a talented and funny and smart performer and writer."

The casting of Edebiri feels even more timely when you realize season four goes into the characters' explorations of identity. Following Slate's decision to step down from voicing the half-black Missy Foreman-Greenwald, comedian and writer Edebiri assumed the role beginning with season four's penultimate episode. "It makes sense and it's the right thing to do, especially as we're diving more into Missy's story," says Edebiri, who'd come aboard the show as a writer eight months prior.

"What helps make Kroll's voice so relevant is he has the ability to change. He still has his point of view and the things that make him him," Edebiri says. "But he's able to learn and grow. There are people who only want their comedic clones around them because they think that's how they keep their legacy, but he doesn't seem interested in that."

The 42-year-old Kroll is serious about becoming a better ally, and a better version of himself. And some of that is reflected in his work on the hit Big Mouth, which he co-created, writes for and voices multiple characters on.

As the public face of a no-holds-barred animated sitcom centered on junior-high classmates grappling with puberty, Kroll doesn't fit an obvious mold of social-justice warriordom. But with Netflix blessing the show with a rare multiseason renewal, Big Mouth has proven itself a standout among a current crop of sexually diverse and sex-positive series that aim to educate as much as entertain. His show's success has encouraged Kroll to continue achieving more with his comedy than simply getting laughs. He's determined to use it as a platform to help others understand lessons he's long struggled to teach himself.

Kroll grew up the youngest of four in affluent Westchester County, New York. He attended Jewish day school, private prep school and Washington D.C.'s Georgetown University. Although Kroll majored in history, he simultaneously gravitated toward media studies and performance.

As a freshman, Kroll bombed a Funniest Act on Campus contest but was encouraged to audition for future one-man-show maestro Mike Birbiglia's burgeoning Georgetown Players improv troupe. By senior year, Kroll was the director, and responsible for casting then-freshman John Mulaney, who would become a frequent collaborator and eventual Big Mouth co-star.

In early 2002, Kroll headed to New York City, where he soon began writing for Chappelle's Show. Within seven years, he was playing uber-asshole Rodney Ruxin on FX ensemble comedy The League.

As Kroll's star rose with The League, Comedy Central offered an outlet for him to showcase his long-running characters. Kroll Show's Bobby Bottleservice, Fabrice Fabrice, El Chupacabra, Rich Dicks and Oh,

"We had to admit our blind spots, and I think we have ultimately landed in a really good place with Ayo Edebiri, who is such a talented and funny and smart performer and writer."

Hello cranks Gil Faizon (Kroll) and George St. Geegland (Mulaney) proved themselves noxious, needy, perfectly self-absorbed satires of reality-TV wannabes.

In 2015, as both The League and his namesake show were ending after decent runs, Kroll looked for ways to challenge himself even further. While voicing a literal feminine douche in Seth Rogen's Sausage Party, Kroll recognized animation as an outlet to "draw anything and go anywhere."

"I was on two TV shows and felt incredibly lucky to be on both of them, but also walking through the airport was a little intense at times," Kroll says of that time. "I was not and am not as recognizable as a lot of my friends, but I think I was like, 'Okay, this is what it feels like to be on TV a lot. Maybe if I do animation, where you don't see my face at all, that will be a nice change of pace as well as just creatively different."

The resulting Big Mouth is a smart, fast-paced raunchfest that celebrates both physical changes and emotional growth. Randy "hormone monsters," frequent musical numbers and plenty of cartoon nudity share space with frank discussions of mental illness, family dysfunction and feminism. The character diversity—ethnicity, sexual orientation, ableness—is off the charts. Three seasons in, the series has been nominated for two Emmys and cited by Time magazine as a highlight of modern adult animation's "new Golden Age." Along with the teen-focused Sex Education and Pen15, Big Mouth is proactively

"We carry so much of our puberty stuff with us into adulthood. That anxiety is something all of us deal with, and it doesn't just go away like pimples do."

Big Mouth character Missy Foreman-Greenwald, now voiced by Ayo Edebiri

"You take an extra look at what you're doing, what the joke is and who the target of the joke is. It doesn't stop you from continuing to do crazy, fun things. It just makes you think a little more before you do something."

helping shift public discourse around sex from taboo to on-trend.

"We carry so much of our puberty stuff with us into adulthood," Kroll acknowledges. "That anxiety is something all of us deal with, and it doesn't just go away like pimples do." Citing inescapable anxiety fodder like social media, 24-hour news cycles and election worries, he continues, "Trying to figure out tools to help lessen it is really useful right now. Hopefully the silliness of our show takes away some of its power."

Big Mouth's fourth season, which has anxiety as a central theme, became Kroll's most personal work to date. Autobiographical plot points abound: experiencing insecurities and inadequacies in public camp showers, sabotaging his deepest friendships, even meeting a future version of his character Nick Birch as an adult paralyzed by the threat of romantic intimacy.

"At the time we were writing this, which was a year and a half ago, I was in a relationship but I hadn't fully committed," he says. "I was really dealing with questions of intimacy and the fear of, Will I be this person who is unable to fully connect to someone?"

The entire season, Kroll says, was emotionally draining to write. "I'm in therapy and I talk about the stuff I'm working through in therapy in the writers' room, and I'm taking the stuff we're talking about in the writers' room into therapy, you know?"

In 2019, in addition to the announcement it had picked up Big Mouth through season six, Netflix revealed a spinoff, Human Resources. Kroll describes the latter as "a workplace comedy about the world of the monsters and creatures on Big Mouth," one strategically designed to cover stories of "birth and death and divorce; all the other huge elements of life that a show about a bunch of kids going through puberty doesn't really allow real estate for."

The hefty workload of dual shows doesn't faze him—The League and Kroll Show ran concurrently—particularly now that Big Mouth can intentionally pace itself toward specific character goals. Like, perchance, Nick Birch going all the way with a girl?

"If that were the case," Kroll groans, "it would be around episode 190—a.k.a., I was 19 when I lost my virginity."

On the acting front, Kroll is adamant about expanding his range of roles, following dramas such as 2016's Loving and 2018's Operation Finale with the upcoming Olivia Wilde thriller Don't Worry Darling. The blogosphere even spread rumors he was up for the Marvel role of Moon Knight, a Batman-esque hero who struggles with his family's Jewish roots.

"I think I experienced that alongside the internet," Kroll laughs. "But something like that would be super cool. Who isn't intrigued by that world? And that particular character for me, as a Jewish guy: Lot of Jewish guys writing comic books; not a ton of Jewish superheroes at the center of them. But I would love to do all that stuff. I'm a big fan of the combo platter."

Whether it's animation or drama or activism, Kroll isn't done trying new things and growing. In light of the world—and comedy—changing, I ask if he would do anything differently today if he could rework some of the Kroll Show characters that made him famous, such as the gay, multiethnic Fabrice Fabrice; the Latino El Chupacabra; or even the differently abled portrayals in Wheels Ontario.

"There are definitely things I would not do now that I did years ago," Kroll says. "But we all have to own everything we've done because we were the ones who did them. You take an extra look at what you're doing, what the joke is and who the target of the joke is. It doesn't stop you from continuing to do crazy, fun things. It just makes you have to work a little harder and think a little more before you do or say something. That's okay."

With Big Mouth, Kroll has found a platform to keep his focus trained on the future, professionally as well as personally. He may have left other dated characters behind, but there will always be more work to put in.

"The beauty of doing a show about kids going through puberty—and really a show about kids going through changes—is that they can evolve and change both physically and emotionally," he says. "For us creatively, we can make our show do the same."

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Sofie Marie

Model **@yummysofie**
Photographer **@ygprophoto**

What was the defining moment that made you realize modeling was your true path? I was a nanny, and the job ended. I had a choice: look for another job as a nanny, or commit full-time to modeling. I chose modeling and have not looked back.

What challenges did you face breaking into the industry, and how did you overcome them? I started in my mid 30's so much later than most performers, so I had a 'normal.' life before I started, so I was grounded. I don't have a big ego, and I realize that I cannot be all things to all people. I decided early on to produce my own content, primarily, so I had artistic control of my career.

How do you stay authentic in an industry driven by image and trends? Being me is easy since I am not very complicated, and I know who I am at my core. Coming into the business from bikini modeling was awesome for me since I could direct my career at my own pace. Being very sexual makes this business fun, and I choose not to perform outside my comfort zone – and I am very comfortable with sex.

What does a typical day in your life look like behind the scenes? Working out is my true passion; I love the way I feel after a hard session. I rarely take a "skip" day since my mood and energy is improved by my dedication to my routine.

How do you balance work, personal life, and self-care? I place my core needs in a place of priority in my life, since a happy Sofie is a sexy Sofie! I am a very organized person, so I make time for myself, my husband and my fans.

What habits keep you grounded in a fast-paced industry? I have been running my own production company for 10 years now, and keeping the company growing and prospering is a key part of my life. I try to stay on top of trends via my co-workers, fans, and social media. The same discipline I have for my workouts is also applied to my business.

How do you maintain confidence on and off camera? As a former pro athlete, I know that a winning mindset allows for success to be achieved. Success is not usually a fluke by doing the work to make success happen is essential to achieving my goals. I am naturally shy in public, but when the camera is on, I own my performance.

How do you prioritize your physical and mental health in such a demanding career? Mentally, I am in a great place with a great life, husband, and good health, and physically I can do all I wish to do. My nickname is the IronMILF, so I focus on keeping myself in good shape, and I love sex.

What does your wellness routine look like during busy shoots or travel? I tend to slack off my workouts when I am working a lot or traveling, since I don't want to overextend myself when my routine is disrupted. I find these forced breaks are really good for me, since when I return, I have renewed enthusiasm for my workouts.

What kind of legacy do you hope to leave in the modeling and creative industry? Things I can control in my life and business: Honesty, integrity, quality, and kindness. Whenever possible, I would like others to see me as those things as well, a hard worker and a great performer.

How do you want people to remember you beyond your visuals? Hopefully, I can inspire other women to embrace their sexuality and love the bodies that they are in. Beauty really comes from inside of us.

Do you feel a responsibility to inspire the next generation of models? We get a chance to work with quite a few new performers, and we always try to model the behavior on set that should be "normal". We have made some wonderful friends through the adult industry, and for that I am grateful.

What message do you hope your magazine feature sends to your audience? Doing the "cave girl" shoot is a homage to Rachel Welsh's iconic role in "One Million Years. B.C." and it showcases my love of the outdoors, being nude in nature, and it was non-traditional, yet sexy.

What are the next big goals you're working toward in your career? Continuing to grow my brand, Yummygirl, and getting to work on some major projects. I would love to do some work on NSFW features and SFW projects too.

Where do you see yourself in the next five to ten years professionally and personally? Hopefully my career will have continued to grow, and I would love to travel and visit beautiful beaches all over the world...especially the nude beaches.

Woman on *Top*

Celebrating Lainie Kazan and Her Playboy Club Showrooms

The extraordinary entertainer's career has included everything from a legendary pictorial to movie stardom—with eponymous Playboy nightclub nooks (and some nookie) along the way

BY **PATTY FARMER** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **THE PLAYBOY ARCHIVES**

Lainie Kazan might be described as not one but two of the most singular figures in American pop culture. Since the 1980s she has made a specialty of playing zaftig, eccentric, older female relatives; you know her face, whether you've seen her in Desperate Housewives, Fuller House, The Nanny or My Big Fat Greek Wedding. But the Kazan of the 1960s and 1970s was a buxom singing sexpot with erotic energy and musical chops in equal proportion. In addition to inspiring comic-book creator Jack Kirby's Big Barda of the DC Comics New Gods franchise, Kazan played a key role in the evolution of the Playboy empire. She was one of the most important celebrities of her time to pose for the magazine, and she played a pivotal role in the last great years of the first-generation Playboy Clubs.

Lainie Levine was born in Brooklyn in 1940 and later took her mother's maiden name, Kazan. Her father was a bookmaker on the fringes of respectability.

"I grew up around that whole thing," she says, meaning illegal gambling and organized crime, "so I didn't really think about it." Both her parents were Jewish but of different strains, endowing their daughter with a combination of Eastern European and Mediterranean DNA. This empowered her to play a wide range of characters and undoubtedly proved to be a factor in the first roles she landed on Broadway: The Happiest Girl in the World (1961) and Bravo Giovanni (1962)—based on Greek and Italian culture, respectively.

Kazan was singing at a small New York club called the Living Room when the producers of Funny Girl, the Broadway smash starring Barbra Streisand, came in one night. Floored by her passionate delivery—a PLAYBOY writer later said that "Lainie tackles every song as if it might be her last"—they hired her as the lead understudy, as well as one of the show's "Ziegfeld girls." To Kazan's dismay, Streisand almost never missed a performance, although when the star happened to fall ill one matinee day in 1965, Kazan ably took on the leading role twice within several hours. It was precisely because it happened so rarely that when Kazan did go on, she attracted attention. When, that November, she appeared on a special Broadway-themed episode of the massively popular television show Bell Telephone Hour, she became the most famous understudy in the country.

Lainie's Room was so successful that the home office asked her to open a second location.

Kazan flourished in the late 1960s, making four albums for MGM Records and appearing in top clubs all over the country. She broke into movies and became a frequent guest on the major variety shows, including The Ed Sullivan Show and The Dean Martin Show. This period hit its peak when Kazan posed nude in the October 1970 PLAYBOY. Months earlier she had been filming her third movie, Romance of a Horsethief, in Yugoslavia, where she met photographer Lawrence Schiller. He suggested she pose for the magazine. "He cajoled me and told me I wouldn't be totally nude—and I wasn't," Kazan says. "They were very Rubenesque pictures, very beautiful."

After that high point, Kazan's career stumbled. She broke her foot while filming a TV special, a stroke of bad luck that put her out of work for several seasons. The entertainment business was changing: Gradually, the old-school supper clubs went out of business, the TV variety shows went off the air and the big record companies shifted to new types of music. For a few years Kazan sustained herself and her daughter by working in low-rent clubs she calls "the toilets of America." When a few of the seedier club owners refused to pay her, she had to rely on tough-talking friends to make sure they honored their contractual obligations.

The Playboy clubs, having had a strong start in the early 1960s, were going through a similar period of change as business fell off. Magazine sales reached an all-time high in the early 1970s, but the clubs were losing their edge; there was less incentive to be served by waitresses in Bunny costumes when women were wearing considerably less on discotheque dance floors. Hugh Hefner tried to expand the clubs by opening family-oriented resorts, but this proved a costly misfire.

A moment of serendipity arrived in the mid-1970s. "I was working at one place in Milwaukee that was just ghastly, and all the checks they gave me were bouncing," Kazan recalls. "I was staying

An outtake from PLAYBOY's October 1970 feature on Kazan, entitled simply Lainie. "There have been many Jewish sex symbols," she told the magazine. (Photo by Larry Schiller)

at this beaten-down hotel, in a room with a cockeyed floor." She remembered a friend, Sam Distefano, who was running the Playboy resort in nearby Lake Geneva, where she had sung a few years earlier. "I called Sam and said, 'I would really appreciate it if I could just come up for a weekend and lie down in a real bed.' And he said, 'Of course! C'mon up.'"

The resort itself was as beautiful as she remembered—"I thought I'd died and gone to heaven"—but she was shocked by the music she heard in the big showroom: a low-rent rock band called Three Shaggy Gorillas Minus One Buffalo Fish. Barely 10 people made up the audience. Mustering her courage, Kazan took her concerns to Distefano: Playboy had once been synonymous with the best in jazz. What had gone wrong? Distefano passed her remarks up the corporate chain of command to Playboy HQ in Chicago until they reached the desk of Hefner himself.

Hef proposed a meeting. Kazan thought it over: "What can I lose? I'll go and talk to them. I didn't have a car. I didn't have any clothes. I had only jeans and a T-shirt with me, and so that's how I went down. And they rented me a van."

In the spring of 1976, she drove to Chicago with her daughter and met with Hefner and Victor Lownes, his partner in the clubs. As Kazan recalls, Hef said to her, "I hear you have a really good idea."

"Actually, I didn't have an idea," she says about her bluff. "I just repeated my observations I had mentioned to Sam. But he quickly said, 'Great, I'm leaving you with Vic. You two work it out.'"

What emerged from those talks was an innovation for the Playboy Club chain: Lainie's Room, an entertainment showroom programmed by the songstress herself, would open inside the Los Angeles Playboy Club. Taking its name from a phone call Lownes made to Kazan at her hotel—she answered by saying, "Hello, Lainie's room"—it officially opened to terrific fanfare in September 1976.

Kazan had overseen virtually every detail. "I changed the menu. I redecorated the whole place. I laid out linen napkins and tablecloths. Put roses on the table," she says. "I made it classy." Naturally she was also the first headliner, but she also booked the other talent—singers, bands and comedians. The room was new and fresh and attracted lots of media attention; its success was a shot in the arm for both Kazan and the clubs.

"My biggest self-criticism," Kazan told PLAYBOY, "has been that I try to be everything." Kazan certainly did almost everything during her time with the L.A. Playboy Club, from performing to opening and running her own showcase club room. (Photo by Larry Schiller)

Lainie Kazan performing in 1977 at the inaugural Lainie's Room inside the Los Angeles Playboy Club. (Photo by Vernon Smith)

The new gig came with challenges—unpredictability goes hand in hand with booking live acts. Kazan recalls that one night Morgana King, who played Marlon Brando's wife in The Godfather, simply decided she didn't feel like singing. And when songstress Barbara McNair's husband was murdered in December 1976, she understandably canceled her sets. In both cases, Kazan dropped her own plans in order to take the stage in their stead. Her devotion paid off. Lainie's Room was so successful that about a year after it opened, the home office asked her to open a second location. Situated on the fifth floor of the New York Playboy Club, it launched in February 1978. Both sites operated as clubs-within-clubs; visitors could access Lainie's Rooms without having to buy a Playboy Club membership—a point Kazan insisted on, and Hef finally acquiesced to.

Perhaps the biggest star to rise from Lainie's Rooms was

" Bob Dylan was a standard in the room. He was like a piece of furniture."

one of Kazan's own musicians: pianist David Benoit. Kazan and her backing band were due to play a gig with the Duke Ellington Orchestra when her regular pianist simply disappeared—lost, she speculates, into his drug addiction. She desperately needed a replacement on keys. Someone recommended Benoit, a name that was new to her. He had played only in instrumental jazz and rock bands and had absolutely no experience accompanying singers, but Kazan took a risk and hired him.

"She really taught me," Benoit tells Playboy. "It was a lesson in how to accompany a singer." He did so well that in 1977 Kazan recorded a new album, her first in a decade, The Chanteuse Is Loose, live at the L.A. club with Benoit on piano. Benoit eventually became Kazan's full-fledged musical director; years later, he would become a Grammy-nominated contemporary jazz superstar.

Stars often entered Kazan's orbit. One night Benoit was in her dressing room, picking up his notes, which Kazan issued after each show, and heard a knock on the door. "I said, 'Who is it?'" Benoit remembers. "'It's Bob Dylan.' I'm like, 'No, no, c'mon. Who is it really?' He says, 'Bob Dylan!' I opened the door, and there was Bob Dylan, right in front of me."

Indeed, Dylan and Kazan dated for much of the time she was running the two Lainie's Rooms. "Bob Dylan was a standard in the room. He was like a piece of furniture. He would come in at least once a week," says Jessie Rich Williams, Kazan's stalwart background singer. "He would come in incognito with a hat pulled down over his head and sit back in Lainie's booth." Dylan, who occasionally brought in his friend Joni Mitchell, was the only one with the chutzpah to give Hefner the cold shoulder in his own club.

Kazan was no stranger to high-profile romantic partners. She is perhaps the only woman in the world to have enjoyed intimate relationships with both Frank Sinatra and Dylan; in a 1979 PLAYBOY story she characterizes herself as something of a short-term serial monogamist: "I'm a one-man woman, even if it's only for a week."

The Lainie's Rooms gave Kazan a career boost that restored much of her stature in the entertainment industry. Offers started coming in from Hollywood. In 1981, Kazan said yes to Francis Ford Coppola, a friend from her Hofstra University days. But the movie they made, One From the Heart, was an epic flop. "A fiasco," she says. "A big, big, nasty failure—but the greatest experience." Despite the poor box office, Kazan's film career was officially resuscitated.

In 1982 she appeared in My Favorite Year, delivering a performance that turned her into everybody's favorite older female relative (and led to plenty of future roles in that vein). The film was so widely loved that 10 years later it was adapted into a Broadway musical, in which Kazan revived her original role and earned a Tony nomination.

Nia Vardalos (left) and Lainie Kazan in the 2002 indie romance hit My Big Fat Greek Wedding. (Photo by Sophie Giraud/Ifc/Kobal/Shutterstock)

Lainie Kazan (left) with famed performer Eartha Kitt and congo-drum player Marcelino Valdez at the 1978 opening of the New York Lainie's Room. (Photo by Vernon Smith)

As Kazan's acting work picked up, she stepped away from the clubs. She had sold the use of her name to Playboy Enterprises, but the Lainie's Rooms just didn't work without Lainie. By the mid-1980s the rooms—along with most of the Playboy Clubs—were history.

Kazan, now 80 years old, looks fondly upon her Playboy years. She was treated as a full-fledged executive by the corporation, masterminding her venues, participating in corporate meetings and much in between. "I would make my points and they would take them in with some seriousness," she says. "It was always a battle, but they would eventually do what I suggested."

It all goes back to her beginnings—to her childhood in Brooklyn and the nascent grit that would bring her such durable and varied success. "I have negotiated with the most intelligent people and the high intellectuals, and I also negotiated with mobsters and with the lowest of the low," she says. "I learned how to be, and I learned how not to be. It was the great lesson of my life."

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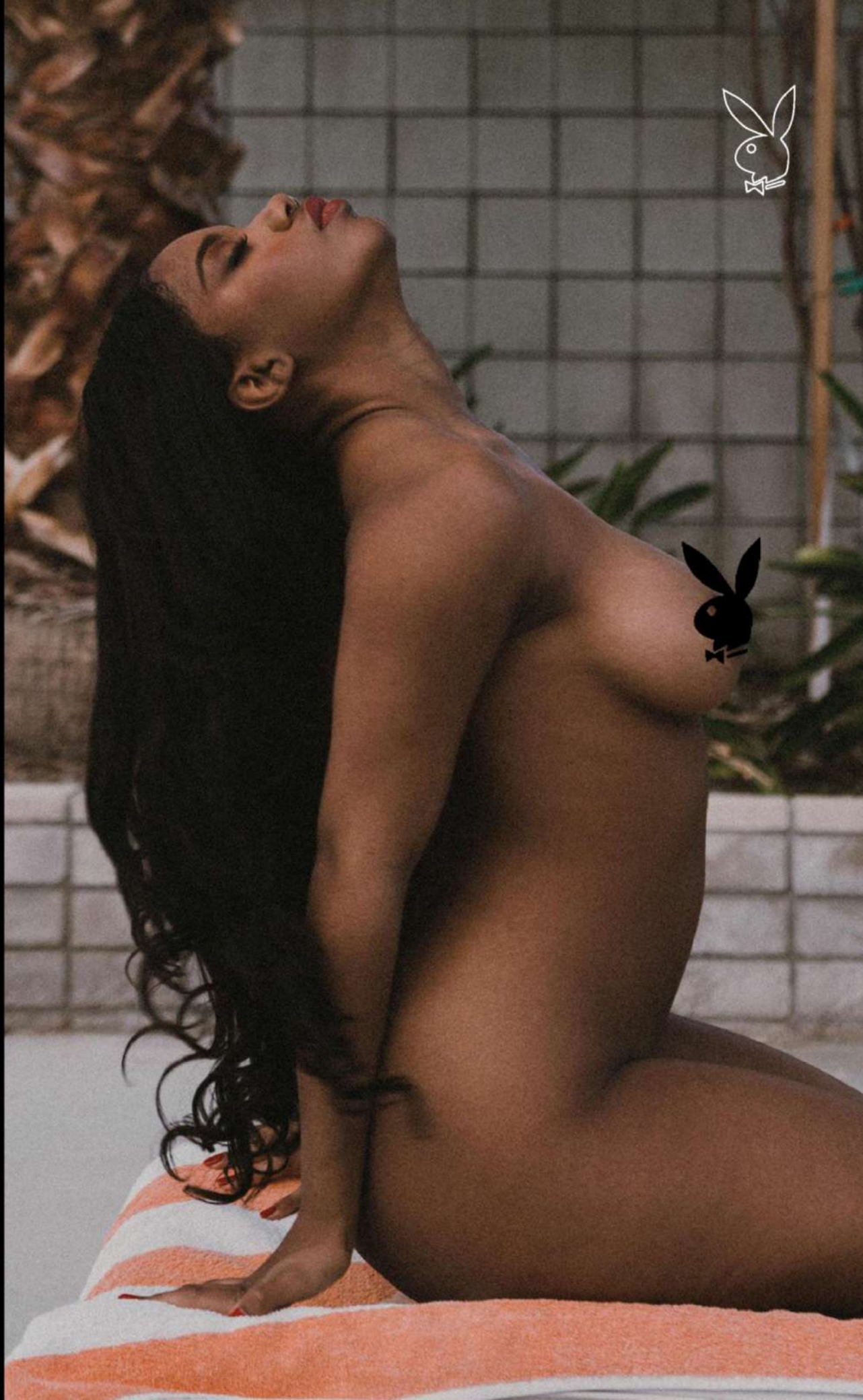

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